WordEATER:94

Wordeater 94

Editor: Jeff Hicks

Student Advisors: Nicolle Byrnside, Jeff Hicks, Amy Lingafelter.

Alumni: Judy Bond, Jeff Hicks, Amy Lingafelter, Maria Mellenger, Nels Nelson, Carla Taylor.

Faculty: Diane Kollman, Andrew Neill, John Stobart.

Cover Designs: Jacob Kennedy: $20

Prose Awards ($5 each)

Heather Baron
Krissi Dunn
Cheryl Kraus
John Softcheck

Poetry Awards ($5 each)

Shayla Boetto
Mark Davenport
Brad Dornick
Sarah Forsythe
Donna Hir
Christine Ward

Apologies go out to Brad Dornick, who was not mentioned in the Wordeater 93 poetry awards category. Sorry Brad!

Deadlines for Wordeater 95 and 96

Wordeater 95	*September 20*
Wordeater 96	*November 22*

Please submit manuscripts and cover designs to John Stobart, room C1069.

For the award winners, only John Stobart is responsible.

This issue contains selections from students, faculty, alumni and friends of Joliet Junior College. Only current students, however, are eligible for awards. The selections have been alphabatized by the authors' names in two lists, current students and alumni/faculty. Questions, comments or requests can be E-malled to: gjhicks@govst.edu Messages will be forwarded to requested parties.

Copyright 1996 Joliet Junior College. Wordeater 94

My Constant Companion
Christine Affrunti

In the morning
A tiny, wet nose touches my eyelid
Whiskers tickle my cheek

During the day
A long, furry tail flicks against my legs
Following me wherever I go

At night
curling up on my chest
Soft purring lulls me to sleep

Travelogue
Michelle Bergeron-Yurgin

Business trip as usual, home is a hotel room
at least for the night

Thirst before bed, walk the hotel halls
searching for something wet

Glow of the pop machine, around the corner
thirst will be quenched

Drop of the coin, clank of the can,
pressure against my temple
Something is not right

Deep, angry whisper in my ear, demanding my
every move
Thirst is the last thing on my mind
Forcefully directed back to my room

Pushed, shoved, thrown to the floor
Telephone cord wound tightly around my wrists
cutting off my circulation, no longer my help line

Pillow case tied across my face
gagged, coughing, breathless
who will hear my cry for mercy

Fear and peace and death and life and hate and love
emotions scrambling through my brain
pounding in my heart
trembling through my body

I listen to the quiet rustle
Of my possessions being invaded by strangers
picked through, destroyed and taken
possessions that were never theirs

an invader speaks to me quietly, threatening
move and die... we will be back

A slam of the door, I am alone
Physically motionless and mentally paralyzed
I wait to be found.....
dead or alive

Thoughts of you
Heather Baron

You're thinking of her
When you sleep
When you wake
And every minute in between
At the same time
I'm thinking of you
When I sleep
When I wake
And it's wasting my time

He Lied For Me
Heather Baron

He lies on the telephone
"I love you too," he says
And I listen
Believe
He hangs up
Inhales his cigarette
Notices her accusing glare and says
"That was my cousin"
And we both believe.
Suckers.

Grocery Store Reunions
Heather Baron

I haven't spoken to my best friend in a while. We're both going in separate directions. I can accept that, but I often wonder what it's going to be like in the future when I run into her. I always notice my Mom running into old friends at the grocery store; are they fake to each other? Or does Mom really care about Kathy's husband's Mother's friend, who is diabetic or something like that. I can almost picture myself pushing a grocery cart full of Coke and junk food, looking through my purse for that dollar-off coupon for disk soap. Then I accidentally crash into another woman's cart, and it happens to be Jorae.

"Sorry, oh my God, Jorae! How are you? It's been so long." I say, realizing I sound just like my mother.

"Fine, I'm married now and have two kids, a girl and a boy. They are such angels. You really must see them. My husband is a lawyer and we just bought a new house that cost a fortune! I must have you over for tea and we can catch up, okay hon? I read in the paper that you got married recently, congratulations!"

"Yeah, well..", I begin, "We were only married for about a month when he heard Vegas calling him again. There was no way I was going to put up with his compulsive gambling. But, that's life. Oh, and I just completed Alcoholic's Anonymous. Let me tell you - that's a bitch! But anyhow Jorae, I have an appointment to get another tattoo, and I'm running late, but call me, we'll go have some drinks and catch up. Nice seein' ya." I say, wondering why she suddenly looks so pale and her mouth is hanging open.

Steps
Heather Baron

If you were to slow down
For once
You would see that I'm always behind you
Protecting you
Watching your every step
So you don't fall
Not watching my own steps
Only concerned with yours.

Reality
Heather Baron

I fumble in the darkness and trip. A huge snake attacks me and I can't breathe. He's squeezing the life out of me and his scratchy tongue is scraping my chin. I'm starting to panic; I can't move!! Someone please help!! .... My eyes fly open - only to realize I'm tangled up in my blankets like a mummy and my cat is sitting on my chest, affectionately licking my face.

GETTING ON WITH YOUR LIFE
Shayla Boetto

When the heart stops oozing blood and
the outpouring is clear as water,
Then you know you have turned the corner and
will be well. When you look inward and all the roads
are no longer dark but clearly light,
then you will know you will no longer be alone.
When gray morning has nothing to do with you.
Your life is no longer a heavy blanket,
then moving will be easy again.
Your body will flow through time like the river
it really is, smooth and deep, no rocks to
catch and crush you, and keep you down.
When the heart slows to a normal pace and
the beauty of birds in the morning does not make
you cry, because you are alone.
Then you know that everything has happened
that is going to for now, and you can get on
with your life, even without the one you love.

Images
Shayla Boetto

It is about stillness, a feeling
for the primitive spirit,
displaced structure, and someone
listening, lying in her single
bed by a window shadow and light
making canvas figures upon the
walls, breathing slowly, taking
it all in as if she were, for this
moment, the only person on the earth

who finally hears what is being missed,
who finally sees what has been
overlooked, who touches herself, slowly,
to feel who she is through flesh,
this minimal product of skeletal
remains, who then turns sideways
from the view, closing her eyes,
but retaining the image, sleeps
with a smile on her lips.

Carbon Copy
Heather Baron

If I become what you want me to be
I'll lose myself
to you and your desires
I'll become her
And we'll only be kidding ourselves.

Blue Skies
Shayla Boetto

Whenever I fly, I love to look out the window. I especially enjoy the days where there are few clouds. As the plane starts to take off, the engines begin to roar, and my heart starts to race. I am going to see a beautiful blue sky.

As the plane floats into the sky, I am looking for blue. We fly through the clouds, and everything is misty. Being in clouds is scary, you cannot see anything. Once you rise through the clouds, the outcome is fantastic. As we peek through the cotton ball clouds, all I see is blue. The sky is so clear and blue. Blue, blue. Blue on all sides of the place The blue does not make me sad; it energizes me. Beautiful blue skies. If you are above the ocean, the water and the sky mesh together into one.

Where did this blue come from? Is it to offset the sun, or the moon? When the sun starts to set, the color of the sky starts to change. There are various shades or red, yellow, and magenta. These colors make the blue look brilliant.

Why does blue make people sad? When I stare out the window, I think of happy thoughts and wonderful times. Why can we not spend our lives in the clouds. Life seems so simple and blue.

Stone Figure of Snow White
Jennifer Chubb

the dust suffocating her with shame
personifies itself into
someone else's reality . . .
running into the corn to escape the madness. . .
the forced emotions
no creature earthly or beyond
should endure . . .
others are always ready to point
a finger in your direction
or cover their faces with a holy veil
to conceal their guilt . . .
hiding in a closet to escape the relentless chase
that child's eyes will haunt you
damning your existence
until your last breath

Sugar magnolia
Jennifer Chubb

paths lead toward infinity
dreams are a myth of supernatural sensationalism
--sources inform you
praise the morning dew drops
of a fragile kingdom
recycle emotions if you desire to betray yourself . . .
desire in itself makes a painted collage
more appealing to a spotted owl . . .
save the trees to masquerade a mink coat
some hang up a deer head
. . . to save it from its own fate . . .
life is recycled death
over and over in continuous motion
until you get it right
grasping for a meaning to it all . . .
so many misguided souls
recklessly abandoned by morality
the seraphim dance on our heads

to remind us of a single rose petal
that awakens spirituality in a dream
just follow the floating feather
into a chamber of light
and open your eyes

Crimson aura
Jennifer Chubb

fragrant petals manifest fragile images
of bold lips pressing against a stained glass portrait
designed with droplets of crimson
you open your arms to a shadow
searching for warmth
others reach for the sun
dancing images struggle to the surface
beholding ripples of a mainstream
candid shots carve themselves
into the trunk of a weeping willow
creative energy channels itself from a painter's
canvas
towards a pharaoh's tomb
parallel universes momentarily collide
to deliver a dream . . .
awaken to the moon
gazing at the horizon

Magic
Jennifer Chubb

spontaneous moments
words are released into being
so much I want to say
the boundaries are erased
an empty page to create images . . .
awkward calmness
generous glances to further the moment
desiring to be near to you by
whatever means possible
what words could i possibly express to you?
saying all other words to you but what i feel . . .
standing on the steps waiting for a moment
it felt right
the stars seemed brighter behind your outline
as i briefly felt your lips on mine
sheer tenderness is always your motive
And I vow never to give less in return

Garden of eden
Jennifer Chubb

journey back to the beginning
a moment apart but still together
time transfixes itself
your breath dances in ecstasy with my senses
caressing my skin with soft spoken words
seducing my neck with those tender lips
body and soul become united
shimmering with transcendent passion

Gravity
Jennifer Chubb

release from burden
shallow breathing regulates itself
earthly mannerisms keep my feet on the ground
awakening spirituality
while balancing on a blue line

Judgment
Jennifer Chubb

slandering memories you believe as truthful
quick to judge
slow to make amends
we all have a certain guilty complex
staining some part of our mind
move on--go beyond
reach out into the darkness if it comforts you
just understand it

Vegas
Jennifer Chubb

completeness over a cup of coffee
passing hours discussing dramas and sagas of
recent and past lives
you slip into the daydream of "home life"
foreign territory to most
no chaotic run-ins
just the gray haired lady with her

slot machines and love affairs
tell tale signs of what
you have entered into . . .
uncharted territory--now discovered

Stillness
Jennifer Chubb

awake in the night in a whirlwind of flurries
abandoned streets frame the native setting
a moment untouched by time
silence and tranquillity prevail
i ease myself in the dormer window
and drape my arms across the gingerbread man . . .
meditative white lights
self-communing . . . flow of ideas
nothing perplexing or earth shattering
living for once in the moment

Shadowlands
Jennifer Chubb

the pain then is part of the happiness now
the tread wore thin
the abstract glass scatters in the air
shining the black light on my thought
you once embodied these because I was you
age . . . life . . . experience . . . it happens
you have not lost me--you just stopped looking

Save the earth
Jennifer Chubb

gazing at stars beneath your feet
flight appears so simple in dreams
black and white complexities
colorful ease
will a dolphin save your life?
mother courage sheds a tear
many struggle to complicate lives
for the sake of a perfect word
you have already traveled that path
why do you return?
soft spoken genius disguised
behind a forbidden fruit
dispel any illusion of modesty to further a facade
poking a soul with pins
makes one the devil's advocate
conjuring up faintly glowing apparitions for a fireside chat
shouting echoes into a well, filled with wishes
stars capture dreams and desires as they
descend towards the earth
vowing to never share your desires with another
living soul

Aquill
Jennifer Chubb

the setting sun pursues the seas and all of its slender
the moon shines in anticipation of its
cosmic companions arrival
the stars appear almost lucid in their twilight way of thinking
constellations laugh at the world below
pitying mankind's mortality

Exhale
Jennifer Chubb

questioning our souls tonight
not out of lack of faith or trust
your essence slipped into my dreams last night
to join its breath with mine
never have such tender images echoed in my mind
than those of you . . .
a doubtless ascending breath of life
designing my sweet dreams

Improvisational III
Mark Davenport

It's funny how things long forgotten
Return with sudden urgency to one's head,
At the least likely of moments.

Memories
In cinematic detail
Playing on a thoughtful screen.

I've seen this movie before.
I've lived its twisting
Turning
Plot.
I wrote the screenplay
And assigned the cast their roles.

But someone else
Unseen in a surreal chair
Directed this production.

I did not make the set
Or design the scenery;
I just say my lines...

When I was young
My mother had an escapist vision
Of the snowy banks of Colorado.
And so we fled the western road-
Left our textbooks
And office clothes
Behind,
Packed our dressers into bags
And sailed the seven seas.

We stayed at our tourist hotel,
And walked around the town
With its name emblazzoned on our chests-
Obviously a tourist, the locals' faces said;
They're too enthusiastic about this place
To really live here.

Oh Colorado:
Where now I'd scale
Your momentous peaks
And from lofty heights
Stare at the white wonderland-

Back when I lusted mountaintops
So I could speed down their winding curves
On my sleek rental skis.
In my tourist ski-class,
I pretended to listen to the rental-teacher.
I was ten years old;
There was nothing anyone could teach me.

When I stumbled into a snowy drift,
She laughed as she offered a hand.
I laughed as I grasped her mitten
And pulled her down with me.

On the ski-lift we rocked our heavy legs
And acted silly.
Our laughter, the sweet innocent laughter
Of children,
Rang soundly through the air.

We blew rings of frosted breath
And pretended it was smoke.

We wrapped ourselves
In each other's arms
And fought away the cold.
I did not think of her swelling form
Pressed tightly against mine.
I did not think to touch that cheek-
I was only ten, after all;
This was before such gestures
Meant anything.

This was before breasts
And facial hairs
Made everything different.

I still remember her hair;
I see in the black night.
Her name was Maria, she said,

And she spoke not one word
Of the English I so covet.
I knew but one word
Of Spanish,
Which I had heard
Big Bird say to one of his
Puppet-friends.
So I said it to her:
"Maria, my friend."

I sang her rock-&-roll
Songs
That I heard on the radio.

Her smile said she understood
Exactly what I meant.
She sang me Spanish
Songs,
And I knew
What she was saying.

I did not want to leave
The snowy banks of Colorado.

Our last night together
In the company of the glimmering
Mountain sky.
We chose a star
Whose brightness overwhelmed the others,
And we decided it was ours.

I tried to tell her goodbye,
But she only smiled at me.
I tried to tell her that
I'd never see her again,
But she spoke a word
That I hadn't told her:

"Happy," Maria said.

"Sad," I replied.

Sometimes I sit out at night
And marvel at the stars.
When I see the one who streaks
Brightly across the skies,
First I'll tell myself that it's an airplane
Heading for the ground.
But then I'll say,
No, that's a star- my star-
Racing for the heavens.

And I wonder if somewhere
Far away,
A woman is gazing
At that same midnight sky,

And does she remember
The star that two children gave
One another?

The Search For Meaning
Mark Davenport

I don't remember being inside the womb,
But I think I would have cherished
That warm and dark consistency;
I think I would of called it heaven.

Sometimes I wonder if I ever left the womb.
I know I abandoned that umbilical night
For the sake of bright neon change-
But did I really leave the womb?
Often I ask if I did not merly travel
From one womb to another,
Mistaking each one for freedom.
From the pedestal of mind I gaze,
From the planes of hindsight,
And I see myself still clinging
To some fading fleeting certainty:
I am beholden to ritual.

As a child
I remember roaming the shopping malls
Clinging to my mother's hand,
Looking at pretty clothes
While dreaming about toy soldiers.
I turned around that day
And mother was gone,
So I found the toys
That I youthfully coveted
And stood there
Among the water guns and video games and toy soldiers
And everything else children covet
But I felt alone, and lost and confused-
Even in the utopia of the toy isle-
So I cried for my mother
Until she came and swept me in her arms,
Carrying me back to the land of nightgowns.

Give me a comfortable routine,
And a life where only love suprises me.

I see within myself a soul
Who follows a miserable routine
For the sake of some direction-
Even the path I walk winds in circles
And I know that,
And have known it,
Still follow it

Because other paths are so uncertain.
I call my path
"insecurities"
because everyone has them.
I call it
"fear"
For the same reason.

In moments of honesty,
I call it WOMB.
But maybe I should call it life,
For it is not there that I erect the walls
That so firmly stand between myself
And everyone else?

I want to be alone,
Though never lonely.

"It's a terrible life- being lonely,"
My lovely grandma said one day
With all of her authority.
The dream she maintains for her aging children
Is not security, or a nice sprawling house;
She wants them to have someone,
To never be lonely.
I guess she's like every other parent
Who wishes for her young
What she never enjoyed.

In college classrooms philosophers debate
The meaning of life
from every angle and perspective.

IN THE FOREST WHERE I WALK
Mark Davenport

IN THE FOREST WHERE I WALK
WHERE I PRAY MY PRAYERS OF SILENCE.

THE BLADES ARE HUMMING
AND THE TREES ARE FALLING.

PIERCING IMMORTAL TRANQUILITY
WITH THE DEAFENING SOUNDS OF
TUMBLING MAJESTY.

BUT THE TREES MUST YIELD
TO THE CARPENTER'S HAND.

SO SOME SOUL MIGHT SIT WHERE ONCE A
TREE LOOMED
AND MARVEL AT THE BROKEN FOREST.

Drummers and Lovers
Mark Davenport

Watching a campfire's lively glow.
The eyes wander caverns of yellow
and walk along ledges of ember as drummers drum
and heads nod along to a tribal primal song that plays
in all our heads . . .

It is the melody of a million crickets.
Chirping unseen in the night.
It is the melody of the moon
and the melody of winds
wailing in the treetops.

It is the melody of a dozen hearts
that tonight beat as one.

Tongues of flames embrace the wood
with hungry devotion.
Burning golden fingers
Longingly caress the midnight sky.

She looked beautiful.
Basking in the fire's light.
While my eyes glowed.
Basking in her light.

Will you make love to me
on sheets of dark and earth?
Piercing is my love.
Wanting are my eyes . . .

And oh her milky moonlight thighs!

The melody of man and woman.

He went back home-
Brad Dornick

Jesus called me up again today. He said it's been dull since he's gone back home to live with his dad. He said he misses the times we'd all get together and get drunk off wine and sing.
He feels like he doesn't belong up there, he thinks everyone's too nice. He says no one is "*real*" enough for him to get along with, and that everyone does everything perfect. Jesus misses our daily errors. How we could just fuck up our lives one day, and the next day go on like it never happened. I guess he can't do that in his father's house.
You know, I really feel bad for him. He should have never went back home. He spent all that time here with us guys, and now he's expected to be perfect again. He said it's almost as if everybody there wants him to save the world or something. Poor guy, he's got more guilt than you or I will ever know. I miss him.

Trace
Brad Dornick

the tracks always head South
the train always churns along
brace yourself because here it comes
the mainline

hold tight to your life tonight
the snow could blow it away
as light as your steps are
you always sink in deep

you can see the traces -
those that came before
blow out their candles
lay back and rest with the day

Saint Bernadette won't heal you
her pools have all run dry
saints don't bother
with tear-stained eyes

Tales
Brad Dornick

"Once upon a time . . ."-
never took place for me
and "Happily ever after . . ."-
is a notion I have yet to see

"Pure Evil" and "True Good"-
I can't really tell between
everything seems more of a blend-
each tainted by the other-
waiting and waiting for the other to bleed

knights aren't white
nights aren't black
the presence of pain doesn't hurt-
the absence of pleasure is much worse

snow is only water
water is only sky
sky is the exit of moisture
moisture's never dry

fairies don't have tails
tales don't have wings
wings won't ever fly
and fire can't burn the sky

What they won't know-
Brad Dornick

I finally hung out to dry all of our dirty laundry
the shirts that don't fit anymore
your jeans that don't were just too holy

Items in our closet that you will never wear again
the skeletons of our old habits
lie forgotten with all the shit you said

I burned the sheets we stained together
got out my pen and signed the papers
chopped down the tree where I carved "forever"

Your high society now will never know
the exact details of our forgotten throws
let alone your fears of what you can't control

-And now you're clean and free!?!

Mom, is that you?
Brad Dornick

Would I know you if I saw you some day? Would your face and mine look the same? Would I feel some strange bond with you? Would you say anything if you felt it too? Where would we start in an attempt to try and mend all the space? You see - I'm the child you gave away.

What?
Brad Dornick

"What?"
"Nothing. Why?"
"You were looking at me weird. I thought you had something to say. I should have known better."
"Oh thanks . . ."
"Don't be like that with me - I thought you wanted to talk or something, that's all."
"Why, do you want to talk about it?"
"Not really. What about you?"
"Sure, but I don't have anything at all."
"I changed my mind, let's not say anything at all."
"Like that's some big switch."
"Fuck off!"
"Fuck you!"
"Why are you like this?"
"Get the fuck out of my house!"
"My friends lived here before you moved in!"
"Fuck it, I'll leave."
"Good."
"Shut up!"
"Have fun at the bar . . ."
SLAM

I SEEK
D. Doogan

I seek an island
I tend to my ship
Carefully built with meticulous affection
Random in structure ever evolving
I seek sanctuary
I tend my fences
Structure for purpose as well as beauty
Logically fit with emotional mortar
I seek the dark tower
I tend to my sadness
Stairs winding ever upward
Trudging, plodding with sweat and with honour
I seek the window
I tend to my wings.
One great leap of hope and love.
Filled with a spirit (that yet may soar)
I seek The Great Dream
I tend to my passport
The gates are not as alluded!
There are no gates.
Only a ship, a sanctuary, a dark tower,
a window, and a Great Dream
I will seek no more
I tend to this garden
And occasionally dream The Great Dream.

Crescent Moon
D. Doogan

There's a crescent moon up in the night
A half-baked moon and that's no lie
There's men in robes of dirty white
Son's of fathers gone

They spit on the earth and piss in the well
And blame it all on the infidel
In front of cameras raining hell
A mindless heartless throng

Women wrapped in chains of cloth
On their shoulders forbidden draught
While men ride careless to what they've wrought
As sons of fathers gone

There's hatred spurred in a flash
Without thought cold steel flash
Blood red boils form the rash
Of sons of sons of fathers gone

LIGHTNIN'
Krissi Dunn

Whenever it would storm, his mother would turn out every last light in the house and unplug everything except the refrigerator. She'd lie very still on her white chenille-covered bed, hands folded across her chest like some stiff laid out for a wake. Every little crackle of lightning would make her holler "Lordy!" in a silly terrified voice.

It started to storm last Tuesday, and the crazy old bitch flew around the house unplugging all of her plastic-still-over-the-shades Early American lamps. She came and told me that I'd best get away from that ironing board if I wanted to have babies. I ignored her and went right on ironing her son's snot-stained hankies. She hurried from room to room, all the while telling me stories I could only half-hear for the thunder. Told me about a bunch of friends who's died via lightnin'. Fire shot right outta the color tv and fried one old geezer in his naugahyde recliner. "Turned some woman from out Hall's Mill black as a log in the fireplace. Lordy!"

"Ironing's shit work," I say. "And I despise doing it."

"You'd best unplug that thing, girl!" She rushed through and flicked off the light I had been using. I just stood there, ironing away, with the lightning flashing outside the window. She laid her fat self out on the bed. It commenced to hail.

"Put that ironing aside, girl!"

"Can't," I say. "This is my only day off this week. Gotta get it done."

"The Good Lord will provide. Unplug that iron."

A little blue spark shot outta the iron, but I knew there was a short in the dial, so I didn't stop. My husband's old momma drove me crazy with her superstitions. Her God was a real weirdo, too. People say her husband went on and died early just to keep from listening to her.

"If you have faith in the Lord, He'll give you what you need. You ain't got to do that ironing now. Unplug it!"

I laugh and say I reckon God is gonna miraculously do my ironing. Gonna jump right outta the clouds and do all of her son's underwear. I laugh good and hard, thinking about that long white beard slaving over BVD's.

"It say in the Bible to trust in the Lord and all good things will come to you. God will punish your laughing. Best unplug that thing quick!"

"I ain't unplugging a damn thing!" I yell. She shuts up for a while then. The apple tree out back is all bent low with wet wind. Hail's pecking at the screendoor like a hungry chicken. I start in on a T-shirt, thinking about his momma laid out in the dark like something silly. Thinking how I'd like to see her catch a big blue bolt in the bathtub. Her all the time telling me something. How to take care of her sweet baby boy. Sweet precious Junior. Same one who has all them pictures in his wallet of girls with donkeys and German Shepard dogs. Uh-huh.

"My son would be all right if he'd ever once step his foot in a church door. You should make him come to church. It's your duty to see he gets saved. God says so, you know."

She waits a long time before saying "you hearing me?"

"I'm hearing, but I'm not listening."

"Unplug that iron this minute, Miss Priss! You'll catch this place afire and I'll die with ya! Burning's a bad way to go! Lordy!"

Thunder shook the old place good then. Something landed with a thud on the back stoop. I set the iron down and went to see what it was. Looked like a bird. A bundle of black feathers, drenched and shiny. Outside everything looked solid gray.

"Them feathers is a sign from God! Unplug that iron and repent!"

I was surprised to realize his old momma must've moved off her bed and went and looked out the window. Usually she just lays there, won't move a muscle, like she's in a trance or something.

"I ain't moved off the bed, girl. God speaks to me through the thunder. You can't hear him 'cause you've no faith. Put that iron aside now. God ain't gonna tell you again."

All afternoon I ironed, till it got so dark that I burned my hand. I never did cut the light back on or say one word to the old witch. I went out at 5:00 and got into our Mustang. I drove over to the market to pick Junior up from work. He's learning to be a butcher for the Jackson Brothers.

Soon as I come into the store, the little check-out floozy goes running off to the back, her eyes all wide from seeing me. I wonder what the hell's going on. Big Bud Jackson comes up then, holding on to my elbow and says, "Your man ain't here."

"Where is he then?" I ask.

"Out at the funeral home," he says. "Lightning got him back in the cooler. He was done stiff time we found him."

The lights were still out when I got back to the house. There weren't no moon at all, and it was still raining hard.

"Lightning! Lordy! I told you God would punish. You should have unplugged that iron!"

I took off my raincoat and hung it up. When I was there in the closet, I could still hear her talking. It sounded like the words was coming outta the walls.

"Now it's just you and me here! Lordy! If you'd just listen to me! But no! Now look what you've done!" She started wailing at the top of her lungs.

Later that night the storm came back. The lamp in my room flickered on and off. I could hear her hollering "Lordy!" clear across the house. I got up and went into her room. I plugged in her bedside lamp and turned it on.

"Cut that thing off quick! Unplug it now!"

She was staring up at the ceiling, trembling all over and rolling her eyes like some dumb-ass horse.

"God says . . ."

"Shut up!" I scream. "Just shut up about God!"

Lightning flashed behind her closed tight drapes. She twitched once and said, "Oh, Lordy!"

I took the bedside lamp and hit her in the face with it. I got some kitchen matches and set the chenille-covered bed on fire. I put on my raincoat and got the wad of money she kept hid in her big black Bible. I went and got in my Mustang.

They say the car's the safest place to be anyway--when it's lightning.

Untitled
Sarah Forsythe

You left me today.
I felt your absence so strongly
Like a raging storm;
Voices growing louder in my head
I squint my eyes to drown them out.

You left me today
I felt your absence so softly
Like a serene breeze;
Magic pictures in my head
I don't want to drown them out.

And I don't know who
To give in too
The breezes on the storm
They battle in my head
Every moment of the day
The day that you left me.
Today.

Frame
Sarah Forsythe

Do we need
something around us
to make us better?
prettier
more attractive
to the eye?
We all
feel more
secure
with a
frame.

Truth
Sarah Forsythe

When I was young
I would try
To pull a fast one
on my mother
and say I didn't steal
a candybar
from my brother's box
of Kit Kats
he had
to sell for
baseball.
But she always
knew.

She had said that
she saw the devil
dancing in my eyes

To this day
I still can't lie.
My eyes
don't lie.

Untitled
Sarah Forsythe

In my life
There is this hole
It's huge
and gaping
and reminds me of outer space.
But it's the inner space
And I try to fill it
all of the time,
with beer
and sex
and food.
But the bottom
must be like a landfill,
because they never
fill it.
what my life needs
is substance.
Something thick enough
and big enough
to not
fall through
the hole.

Untitled
Sarah Forsythe

If I saw you there
I think I would
Look away
And scratch my head
Or pick imaginary lint
off my sweater
Like I usually do
when I'm pretending
not to see someone-
especially you;
As if I could wrap myself
up into a little ball
In the middle of a bar
or the mall
or my class
And disappear into nothing
Because that is how I feel.

I should be so bold
And go up to you
And throw your drink
in your face
And point out that your date
is a slut
and she has roots
And everyone in the whole place
would laugh
and point
And I would be so cool
And I would never
Wrap myself into the ball again:
My head would never itch
And I would never have lint
on my sweater

But I am not so bold.
I have never been brave.
So i continue
To claw
At my scalp
While Jennifer tells me
How I am such a better person than he
because I sit here
with maturity and dignity,
without the need to flaunt
a new lover
in an old lover's face
I would thank her
But bluntly point out
That I sit here alone

And so I pick at my sweater
so much that it begins to snag
And roll into my ball
And disappear
And that is what I
think that I would do
In a bar

Or the mall
Or my class
Disappearing
With my brave dreams
Pretending
Always Pretending
Not to see you
But I always see you-
especially you.

Sarah's Angels When She was Seven
Sarah Forsythe

Surely, you can feel the angels. Close your eyes and you see a mist against a black sky. These are they. And you feel a breeze upon your face. These are they too. If you close your eyes tighter, the mist becomes vibrant shooting colors; this is heaven. And the breeze on your face gets ever so gentle now. And you can fall asleep. Because the angels are watching. Surely you can feel them.

Fist
Sarah Forsythe

Fingers clenched tightly
close together,
turning red, pulsating,
like a heart.

The pulse in
your fingertips
and your temples
keep time.
groans from within
fight to come out.
Frustration
echoing
off the walls
of your soul
Passion in every sense
of the word,
Fist.

Way Up Here
Claudia Gates

Every time I need you
You disappear
It's as horrifying as not seeing your own reflection in a mirror.
At responsibility you jump back
So many miles you need to run
And don't want to jog a lap
So isolated
On thin ice I skated
Fell deep in a crack
Stuck in this water I am trapped
I took a dangerous risk
The temperature feels so brisk
The smell of disappointment
My closeness to you is now bent,
Like a pretzel.
When I think of you I get so, Highly upset.
Blasting off in a plane, I gotta jet.
Gettin' up outta here
Meeting your approval is no longer a major problem dear.
It's amazing the things you can see miles away,
Way up here.

Thought #1
Jeff Hicks

I dreamt last night that Oral Roberts was the anti-Christ
But I knew that not to be so,
as the honor remained within the body,
of Ronald McDonald.
yet,
through all of it,
I had to admit,
I still loved the french fries
and the shamrock shakes

Thought #2
Jeff Hicks

Mommy said Shirley McClain was God
But I didn't exactly believe her,
for I knew it was Mr. Potato head,
as he sat upon his altar,
next to my Legos and slinky
As I plopped down to my red shag rug,
to hold communion,
with twinkies and my big sister's tea set.

Psychotic therapy
Jeff Hicks

a body lain
on the couch so plain
nothing to lose
all to gain
still the spirits,
remain

physical pain
emotional drain
nothing to lose
all to gain
still the spirits,
remain

sin in vain
a red stain
nothing to lose
all to gain
still the spirits,
remain

mental train
of thought a strain
nothing to lose
all to gain
still the spirits,
remain

Reemergence of my inner child
Jeff Hicks

Fierce wind outside my window
lightning giving glimpses of the trees
haunting at night
I in my bed
flannel sheets over my head
and Pooh bear in my arms
hoping morning will be here soon.

Rejected... but used to it
Jeff Hicks

Such a good friend
not just single
more like alone
another day passes
I try not to notice

Cookie Conundrum
Jeff Hicks

Aunt Pat made brownies again
she never could cook
I ate one to appease her
low sugar
no fat
no sodium
no taste
powdered cardboard came to mind,
with nuts

Untitled #1
Jeff Hicks

Carrie soaks in the bath
bubbles drifting, clinging to her skin
radio is on
hot tub, cool jazz

Untitled #2
Jeff Hicks

Is death a painful action?
Or is life more of a torture?
Can being be better than not?
Questions to be answered but never shared.

Untitled #3
Jeff Hicks

A whisper
so quiet, so soft
A word
so pure, so true
A saying
so known, so set
Silence to be relished

Bodhisattva
Jeff Hicks

Through time sublime
of mental tangent throughfare
passing of knowledge, thought
creation destruction
evolution
mental pollution
with rejection,
of recognition
a fall from grace
only to rise,
through enlightenment

Give and Take (or the basics of relationships)
Jeff Hicks

Try me
Buy me
Take me
Make me
Hold me
Scold me
Choose me
Lose me

Strange People
Jeff Hicks

Margie thinks her thumbs talk to her.
While Otto's masturbation fantasy,
of Regis and Kathy Lee,
in applesauce,
is getting out of hand
Nancy licks the rug,
saying it gives her a buzz,
static electricity on the brain.
And Carla wears her panties over her jeans,
high, French-cut her favorites.
As I, the normal one,
go home and feed my cinnamon toast old car tires;
it likes Goodyears best (radials of course).

Bridge II
Jeff Hicks

Cards strewn about
slang and foreign language abound
as Morty reads Steinbeck.
Joshua sleeps, sprawled out
And that strange girl with the orange hair
talks once again of shaving her crotch.
The hall smells of nutmeg . . .
Bake sale!
College recruiters spot me
I hide from their gaze,
as I get up and leave.

Divorce
Donna Hir

Seventy-nine Malibu
wipe my tears and say goodbye
to my childhood days

LIES
Donna Hir

I like your smile
I like your face
I like your touch
and warm embrace.
I'll care for you
I'll cry for you
I'll give my soul
I'll die for you.
I'll never leave you
I won't let you go
and all my feelings
are for you to know.
When I doubt you
I'll inquire
in such ways
that you'll transpire.
Remember when I say
I'll leave you never
and that you're
in my heart forever.
No need to ask
the reasons why
because my love
these are all lies.

October
Donna Hir

You jumped from a bridge
and they built a shrine in your name
-but who am I to judge?
The Bible says it is a sin
to take one's own life
yet they clutter by your casket
in numerous amounts
and give you respect.
They dedicate a page to you
and pass over what really happened.
Maybe that's how they justify their pain
-by saying you suddenly passed
and building a shrine in your name.

I Want a Family
Donna Hir

I want a family
that doesn't add water to empty shampoo bottles.
I want a family
that doesn't believe in leftovers.
I want a family
that doesn't watch shows in syndication.
I want a family
that doesn't act before they think.
I want a family
that doesn't hurt the one's they love.
I want a family
that doesn't have to see matinees.
I want a family
that doesn't expect perfection.
I want a family
that doesn't laugh when you're serious.
I want a family
that doesn't hide their emotions.
I want a family
that doesn't believe in buying used cars.
I want a family
that doesn't believe that things will never change.
But most of all
I want a family.

The Gift
Donna Hir

There you sit
shimmering, glimmering
all wrapped up
a wonderful package.
Your contents
probe my curiosity.
I want to know
what's inside
is there more
than just the
wrapper that surrounds you?

Monroe
Donna Hir

Marilyn and I
cruising down
Route 66
in her pink Cadillac.
She smiles
and her bonded underbite
decays and falls out.
She runs her frail hands
through her once golden locks
and pulls away clumps of gray.
My brow crumples
and then I realize
that Marilyn died a long time ago.

Mother
Donna Hir

She says she hasn't cried
for twenty years
Then why does she always
look so sad?
She says she doesn't get depressed
anymore
the lithium keeps those
blues.....away
Then why does she
isolate herself?
She says she doesn't get angry
much
Then why does she
rip the phone off the wall?
She says she loves
my stepdad
Then why does she keep him
at such a distance?
She says she'll always
be here
Then why does she pick up
in an instant and leave?
She says
that I'm nothing like her
So why don't I believe her?

Simple Complexity
Donna Hir

Walking the gold-painted lines
that divide the highway
filled with DUI's
and speeders.
Accidents - roadkill-
I realize the way we drive
is the way we live.

Like a Hiccup
Donna Hir

The way the oxygen gets sucked from your mouth.
How you have to remember an automatic function
such as breathing.
The way your throat takes complete control
of the situation.
How you're helpless and victimized
by this interruption.
The way you feel relief when it's over.
How you think it'll never stop.
When will your breaths be uninterrupted?
When will the pain escape your busy life?
and let you be as you were again?

The way some people try to get you
to laugh so you won't think about it anymore.
The same way some try to scare you to make
it stop its vicious cycle.
How you hold your breath
wishing it would just leave your body.
How embarrassed you get when it happens and
how ashamed you feel when it's over with.
Then it all stops
and you forget for a second
just how you're supposed to react
to that oxygen
to that freedom you had recently
been robbed of.
Your body needs time to adjust.
And just as you are back functioning
it happens again
and you never quite understand
its purpose
but you look forward to a time
when it'll stop forever.
You look forward to a time
the time you decide whether or not
it will happen again
or if it will affect you
the same way over and over.
Will it control you forever
or can you find a way to make it stop
forever?

Cat's eyes
Theresa Jones

So ever-alert marbles,
Pools of green curiousity.

Fear of Water
Jake Kennedy

I asked if she would swim for me
to watch the waves collapse
so late though the sky not dark at all
and Venus shown shimmering crystals on the water
it is now the forest cannot end
along the willow vines
and the giants while they sleep
this means I will be naked for you
On soared that laughing summer night
trees alive and green as if it were noon
found her in a hollow with a soul that matched my soul
each creature sang its song for us
the branches they drooped so low
to reach the water's edge
and we lay down together
inside that summer night
I was amazed to watch her
she glistened in the moonlight
crystals all about her
it was such a quiet sight the waves around her
I had to hold my breath
and watch her body
I will be naked for you
for the glimmer in your eyes

The Mirrored Lady
Cheryl L. Kraus

The Lady waits upon the wall
For one no longer old to call.
Her eyes, like beacons in the night,
For one no longer old to sight.

I asked of one no longer old
About the Lady to be told.
She, to the mirror drew me near,
And smiled at her familiar there.

The one no longer old was met
By a reflection smiling. Yet,
As I approached did quickly pass
The Lady's image from the glass.

I could not see the vision's glare.
That siren song I could not hear
Was candied chanting to the one
For whom the vessel, void, had come.

By sorceress of reason stung
Devastating weltanschauung.

Maiming memories day by day
Till sentience was swept away.

The smile has left the Lady's face.
She disappeared without a trace.
Beyond my reach, beyond my call
The Mirrored Lady on the wall.

Flight
Cheryl L. Kraus

Grandma Mary died when Becky was ten. It surprised Becky to realize she had been that old, because memories of her Grandmother were so few. A large-boned face, big teeth, and a generous bosom in a simple blue house dress that was the image Becky saw projected in some old home movies. Though Mary and Pop lived with Becky's family for three years, the thing she remembered most clearly was the day Mary passed away.

Pop had let Grandma Mary's pet parakeet out of his cage that afternoon, and Becky, fascinated by the clever bird, asked if she could sit and watch Petey. Pop pointed to an old wooden ice-cream parlor chair and told Becky, "Ya, it is OK, sit, sit." Becky plopped down next to her grandmother's bed.

Swooping down from a curtain rod, Petey darted around the room in splendiferous aerobatics, Becky coaxing him on. Each time the bird took aim at her head, Becky shrieked with feigned alarm and flung her arms over her head. Blue, green and yellow melded into a miniature rainbow of exotic hues as Petey rejoiced in his freedom. Becky thought the brightly colored little aviator an odd pet for her grandmother. Mary, with her austere looks, hard jaw, and small hazel eyes seemed colorless when juxtaposed with Petey's flamboyant feathers. Yet as the bird flew from window to dresser, door frame to Grandma Mary's head, the old woman's eyes seemed to soar along with her companion. As Becky and Pop watched, Mary raised her withered hand, beckoning to the tiny bird. Petey perched upon her index finger and warbled, "Petey is a good boy," while Mary slowly raised her hand close to her face and cooed faintly to the parakeet. Petey stretched out his lime-colored neck and like a little rogue, bestowed a gently pecked kiss on Mary's sagging bottom lip. Then he hopped up on his mistress's head. Becky laughed with delight as she watched Petey high-step through long, straight hair, pulling grey strands loose from the tight braid Mary always wore.

Twenty minutes later, Pop gathered Petey up and returned him to his cage. Becky looked at her Grandmother's eyes drifting closed and knew it was time to leave.

Stephen sat in a worn brown Naugahyde recliner staring out the window. His fingers had rubbed smooth the imitation-leather grain on the arms of the chair. A bowl of melted ice cream waited on the scarred nightstand. When Mark shifted in the bed, Stephen stood up and hurried to her side, hoping she would be able to eat something. "Come Mary, eat just a little," he begged as he smoothed the stray strands of coarse hair off her forehead. She mouthed an indiscernible reply, her voice muted by paralysis.

Slowly Stephen spooned small amounts of the melted ice cream into his wife's stroke-numbed mouth. When a bout of choking racked Mary's body, Stephen lifted her skeletal shoulders off the pillow and held her as she hunched forward. Lines of battle etched her face as she fought to clear her throat. Stephen held a jar beneath her chin so she could spit out the saliva that was blocking her airway. He spoke to her softly, soothing her with Slavic sounds as he wiped her mouth with the ever-present white handkerchief. When she was able to breathe again, he settled her back against the pillow and covered her with the blanket.

Joe stuck his head into the room. "Is Ma OK?" he asked.

Stephen looked at Joe solemnly. He knew that his son blamed him for not leaving Mary in the hospital last year. Maybe Joe understood things better than me, Stephen thought. Her youngest son had wanted her to have an operation and had even admitted his mother into the hospital. Stephen remembered how Mary had cried. Mary, who had always been the strong one, had been afraid, believing as did Stephen that people went to the hospital to die. When she had pleaded to leave that unfamiliar place, Stephen had gone against his son's wishes and taken Mary home. Now, when Mary was so weak that nothing could be done, Stephen wondered if he should have done as Joe wanted.

"She is OK," he answered finally, waving his son out of the room.

As he turned back to his wife, he recognized again the determination that kept her from leaving him. He stared at Mary's tightly clenched jaw, locked in a constant struggle. She could not relax while her heart continued to fight.

Stephen picked up the treasured silver hair brush from the dresser. It was the brush he had given her years ago, slightly tarnished and worn from the many spankings she had administered to their children over the years. Sitting beside her on the bed, Stephen began to unwind her braid. He recalled the first time he had brushed Mary's hair. Fifty years faded into moments as he lifted a lock and slowly drew the brush down through the tangles. He could see her as she had once been, a strong peasant woman, slightly taller than he. While others may have thought her plain, Stephen had thought her beautiful. He had liked her eyes, the way they quickened with intelligence. Stephen had especially liked her long golden brown hair that softened her angular features.

Stephen could almost feel the firmness of her youthful body, wrapped modestly in the flannel gown she had worn to bed that night. He closed his eyes and let his hands look back with long forgotten passion as he caressed the wisps of grey.

Stephen brushed his wife's hair for more than an hour, gently running the bristles through the fragile strands. When finally he looked down at her, her face was free of strain, relaxed, youthful in repose. Mary was beautiful once more.

Art
Tracie Laczynski

I'm in deep
That which is deep in me
Blue White and Black
Underground All Around
My cave inside
My soul
Outside my body
Swimming in air, in water
Blazing like fire
Through my eyes
And into you
We're in deep
That which is in deep in us
Together
Whether we are hand in hand
We know Similar Burning
Of the mind through our hands
To music To poetry
As one
Never separated
Whether we go hand in hand

Untitled
Tracie Laczynski

IF I RUN FAST ENOUGH,
WILL I END UP SOARING
OR OUT OF BREATH?

Sacrifice
Tracie Laczynski

To Sacrifice
She walks twice around the hill
Praying to the god above
Then down on hands and knees
The flame burns high on the wick
Running wax down rivulets in roots
Placed high in a tree
Go on
Go on
The fairies in the forest are waiting
Tonight the wild ride takes place
He's calling forth his willing servants
She walks three times around the tree
Two more times to go
Chosen by Druid priests
To run as the hounds are sent upon her
Mist covers low
Moon has yet to rise
Go on
Go on

We're waiting for the chase
To meet on mortal lands
Once around the hill
Slowly around the hill
The full moon rose
But she runs at the sound of the horn

Untitled
Mary Honroe Loughlin

I heard the song of winter,
during its darkest slumber,
a haunting, chilling tune,
it invades the sleep I crave.
Forcing me to sit awake,
listening to the plaintive howl
of souls culled from the living.
my skin bristles as I feel the
chill touch of true dark

The Season of Neglect
Bob Misiurewicz

Callused, wrinkled hands groping for his wheels
like his memory
searching.

For a time, a place, finally a name.
Marilyn! Marilyn! Come on!

His sharp voice punctured the atmosphere.
For a moment clearing the air of the tangled odor
that drifts and fades like the old man
to sleep.
So peaceful in his pain.

The old black woman bitches and moans in a muffled tone
Like a dull siren.
Scolding her husband in a scene daily replayed
to an audience of nurses and aides
from her bed like a stage. A misplaced piece of her past
played out.
So peaceful in her pain.

From other rooms; zoo-like sounds, like sad songs languish
in loathsome lyrics from hell.

In a world of burgeoning boundaries behind locked doors
where death; suspended like a dark seraph
hovers patiently poised to guide those passing.
So peaceful in their pain.

Behind the Bastion
Bob Misiurewicz

Concrete walls with barbed wire trim.
Sunlight void from gray cells dim.
Clenched fists stroking iron bars
disconsolate abode.

Overpaid and overweight,
sleepy sentries guard the gate.
Uniformed so uninformed mind,
absent from their watch.

Hairy backs and muscled arms
the tattoo artists canvas charms.
Half-naked men who wait their turn
to sacrifice their skin.

Culture thrives like hatred flows,
on the waves of radios.
Voices rapping toxic speak
a desperate diatribe.

lifers locked in loveless hold,
dagger eyes stab sharp and cold.
Animal-like quarters keep,
in sacrificial sin.

Futures lost and fading pasts,
sentenced, branded freak outcasts.
Paradigm or paradox
the prison will not judge.

The Bunker
Ralph W. Mlaska

Characters
1. Sergeant, sniper
2. Animal, sniper
3. Ivy, radio operator
4. Mitch, sniper
5. Red, F.N.G., (fucking new guy)
6. Flash, old-timer security
7. Rucker, old-timer security
8. Viet-cong, almost naked except a loin cloth and a satchel charge

Scene
A bunker surrounded by sand bags. Half the bunker has a roof covered by sandbags. The soldiers are dirty unkept. Five of the men have M-16 rifles, three have M-14 sniper rifles with night scopes. Uniforms must be dirty and torn. A short span of (coiled) wire, 15 feet, a line of barbed wire in front and a line of barbed wire in front of that. The men wear soft hats called hoggies. A 50 caliber machine gun with a starlight scope sticks out from the sand bag barrier. An M-79 grenade launcher is used often in this scene.
Scene starts at twilight when the seven walk up to the bunker to spend the night.
(The light slowly dims, giving the effect of fading sunlight.)
SARG: Animal, you're on guard for the first three.
(Animal sits behind the sandbags. The others file into the small opening that leads them to the inside of the bunker. Animal talks in low, griping tones that are ignored by the others as they file in.)
ANIMAL: I'm always the first. Hell, I did just as much as the others. Fuck it! Fuck the army, fuck this war, fuck MacNamarra, fuck Nixon.
(Animal checks all the weapons, the 50- and M-79 making sure that they are loaded and at the ready)
Sarge comes out of the bunker.
SARG: As soon as it gets dark, battalion wants the M-79 used every 15 minutes, fire two or three grenades out there, anyplace beyond the wire.
ANIMAL: Why?
SARG: How in the fuck do I know. Just do it ! Mark some targets and aim for them.
ANIMAL: How am I supposed to hit them in the dark?
SARG: Man! Stop pulling my chain, you're not an F.N.G., so don't act like one. Just mark them so you get a good idea where they are at. You might get lucky.
Ivy comes out from the bunker.
IVY: You got a call on the horn, Sarg.
SARG: What now?
(The Sarg goes back into the bunker.)
IVY: Say, short-timer, how's it going?
ANIMAL: It's bullshit man! I shouldn't be here. Six weeks left and I'm home. I should be back at base camp, not in this shit, man!
IVY: Calm down. Sarg has been trying to get you out of here, but battalion don't have a replacement for you.
ANIMAL: That's bullshit! If I was an officer they would bring me back. That ain't fair. They only spend six month in the field. Fuck man! I've been out here for thirteen. No one makes it to fourteen; you know that!
IVY: Man, if you don't calm down, you ain't going to make it out of here.
ANIMAL: Fuck that shit too. I'm out of here tomorrow. I'm on the first chopper out. I don't give a shit what Sarg or anyone says. Fuck it. They can keep their medals and give me a court martial. I don't give a fuck. I'm out of here! Watch me.
(Sarg comes back out.)
SARG: Okay, they want you to start shooting the M-79 now.
IVY: Can I shoot it, Sarge? Can I? Come on, I never get to shoot these things.
SARG: It's up to Animal. It is his watch.
ANIMAL: Go ahead! I don't give a fuck. Shoot all three rounds; get your rocks off.
(Animal hands the M-79 to Ivy. Ivy takes the launcher, aims and fires, reloads, fires again, reloads and fires the third time. Thud, a hollow sound each time he fires. Like a cork being pulled out of a large tube. A three second pause then a loud boom at the back of the audience, a kettle drum would make the desired effect. Two more of the same, Note- the drum should be moved for each shot.)
ANIMAL: Did you cream your pants, shoot your cookies?
IVY: Screw you, asshole.
SARG: All right! Knock off the bullshit.
IVY: Hey Sarg! Animal says that he's going back to the fire-base tomorrow.
SARG: You damn right he is! I don't want him out here anymore. Sorry, Animal, you're too spooky lately. You have to go back as a permanent K.P., but

you'll be out of here.
ANIMAL: K.P.! Screw that! I'd rather stay with you. I ain't going to do K.P. for six weeks. I ain't leaving.
SARG: You're on the first chopper out of here tomorrow, even if I have to carry you. The way you've been acting, you're going to get your silly ass killed. I ain't going to live with that.
(The stage light is faded completely and the stage is totally dark. Only the bunker area is lit. Ivy goes into the bunker the Sarg starts to follow but stops at the entrance to listen to Animal.)
ANIMAL: Come on, Sarg, I don't want to do K.P. for six weeks.
SARG: I've been listening to you bitch everyday for the past two weeks. What the hell did you think? Someone was going to say "Hail the conquering hero, let's put him in charge of finance?" You're a grunt. They got no use for you. You'll either burn shit or pull K.P.. I don't care, as long as you're out of my hair! Besides you'll get three hats and a cot. It's more than any of us will get.
(Sarg goes into the bunker. All lights fade into total darkness on stage, to show a passage of time. All lights on the bunker turn back on. Red comes out of the bunker.)
RED: It's my turn to pull guard.
ANIMAL: You're five minutes late.
RED: Not by my watch, I set it exactly to Sarg's.
ANIMAL: Okay, okay! You know how to shoot the M-79?
RED: No, I never did.
ANIMAL: It's simple. Open it up like a shotgun, pop in a round, then fire it. Over the fence! Two every fifteen minutes. Good night!
(Animal goes into the bunker. Over the speaker system we hear Red thinking).
RED: (Thinking) Wow man! I can't believe I'm here. I believe in love not war. This whole scene is freaking me out. I guess I'm supposed to stand here and play guard for these freaks. I don't think I should tell any of them that I burned my draft card. A lot of good that did. They cut my hair. How am I going to go home looking like this. I can take the uniform off, but I can't hide my head. Damn, it's dark out here. I can't see my hand in front of my face. I ain't going to shoot that grenade thing. Hell, I ain't going to shoot my rifle. They can't make me. I told them I wouldn't fight. But they sent me here anyway. No, man, I ain't going to shoot anything!
(A noise to the left of the bunker causes Red to react by pointing his rifle.)
RED: Who's that?
(A noise to the front, Same reaction.)
RED: Who's that?
(Back to the left the same. Red points his rifle.)
RED: Who's that? Com' on man, I'll fucking shoot you.
(Then to the right of the bunker a loud scream.)
SCREAM: Uk-oooou!
(Red turns, his rifle on his shoulder.)
RED: Com' on man! Who's there?
SCREAM: Uk-oooou!
RED: Don't screw with my head like this, who's there?
SCREAM: Uk-oooou!
(Red lets loose with three shots BANG, BANG, BANG. He jumps behind the sand bags and only his head can be seen. Everyone comes quickly out of the bunker and is in a firing position.)
SARG: What is it?
RED: Someone is out there.
Everyone is quiet and listens.
FLASH: There ain't shit out here.
RUCKER: I'm going back to bed.
SCREAM: Uk-ooou.
RED: There it is.
(BANG, BANG, BANG. He fires three more shots before anyone can stop him.)
MITCH: Damn F.N.G.
Everyone except Sarg goes back into the bunker.
RED: What? Didn't you hear that?
Scream: Uk-ooou.
SARG: It's only a fuck-you lizard.
RED: A what?
SARG: It's a lizard about three feet long, all night long he'll be making that sound. Don't let it bother you. All of us have made that mistake. Oh! You should know that there are fish that walk out of the rice paddies over the banks to the next paddies. I'm just telling you this so you don't shoot your foot off.
(Sarg goes back into the bunker and Red is alone.)
RED: (Thinking) What the hell! Lizards that curse at you, fish that walk out of water, and people that eat monkey meat.
(Light on the bunker turns off leaving stage dark. Light back on. Mitch comes out of the bunker.)
MITCH: Okay, killer, it's my turn now.
RED: Can we talk awhile?
MITCH: NO! Get your F.N.G. ass in the bunker.
(Red enters the bunker. Mitch is alone. Mitch takes the M-79 and fires three rounds. Sound effects are

like before. Mitch looks around the area, then sits in a corner against the inside wall of the outside of the bunker. He takes a pen light turns it on and sticks the end of the light in his mouth and takes paper and pen in his hand writing a letter with a small light focused on the paper.)
MITCH: (Thinks as he writes his letter.) Dear Sandie and kids. I hope that this letter finds you all in good health. The last letter that I got from you said that you were worried. There isn't any reason to be. I know that the news back home makes it seem bad over here. But that is what they get paid to do. Hell, I'm on one of the largest fire-bases in Nam. Nothing is going to happen here. I went swimming in the China Sea today. I wouldn't even know that there was a war going on. I don't even carry a rifle. I just work in supply and couldn't be safer. The closest that I get to the war is when I see some grunts that come in for supplies. You know me! I ain't the hero type. Later me and a few of the guys are going to see a movie, Bye, Bye, Birdie. It's supposed to be a good one.
So you see there ain't anything to worry about. I'll be home in four months and we'll laugh about all this. I bet the kids are getting big.
(He turns off the light, folds the letter, and puts it in his pocket with the pen.)
MITCH: Man I got to Pee!
(Mitch goes around to the left side of the bunker and vanishes in the dark. Animal comes out of the bunker with a roll of toilet paper and his rifle. Jumps over the right side of the sand bags and walks down by the extreme right of the wire and squats in the dark. Mitch returns and sits down. Animal makes a grunting noise and Mitch is alerted to it. Unable to see Animal, he calls in the bunker.)
MITCH: You guys better get out here. We got company.
(Everyone rushes out and takes their firing positions.)
SARG: Where are they?
MITCH: (Pointing at Animal) There over there by the wire. I didn't see them but they are there!
Sarg takes his rifle and aims through the starlight scope.
SARG: Okay, I got one. Can't make him out, but I got his outline. Looks like he's squatting, I got his head silhouetted against the sky. Okay come on just one more bob and your mine.
FLASH: Hey! Where's Animal?
SARG: Damn it! Check the bunker.
Sarg keeps his aim. Flash goes in the bunker a few seconds later he comes out again.
FLASH: He ain't in there!
SARG: I knew it!
Sarg calls out
SARG: Animal is that you?
No answer.
SARG: Animal is that you?
ANIMAL: Yeah!
(Everyone relaxes, Animal returns back to the bunker. Sarg jumps on him, sitting on animal's chest Sarg has a grip on Animal's collar. The toilet paper rolls out of Animal's hand.)
SARG: You stupid fuck!! I ought to knock the crap out of you. You got any idea how close you came? I took the slack out of the trigger. If it weren't for Flash you would be dead meat!
ANIMAL: What ! I just had to take a shit!
SARG: Don't you tell anyone that you are going out? What is your problem? You want to get it you're last night out?
(Sarg stands pulling Animal up with him. Still holding onto Animal's collar he shakes him as he yells at him.)
SARG: You get your ass in that bunker and don't leave it.
(Sarg pushes Animal into the opening. Animal enters followed by everyone except Mitch and Sarg.)
SARG: Man! Is it me, or has everyone gone nuts?
MITCH: Just another night in Nam.
SARG: I left my watch in the bunker. What time you got?
MITCH: Fifteen to twelve. (He says as he looks at his watch.)
SARG: In fifteen minutes I'll be twenty-two. I feel like I'm eighty. That's all I needed, to shoot that crazy jerk. They always get like that when they're going home. He's got to be on that chopper tomorrow. If for some reason I get busy, I want you to make sure that he's on that chopper. If he gives you any shit, knock him out or whatever you have to do, but get him out of here.
MITCH: O.K., Sarg I'll get Flash to help me, but I promise you he'll be on it.
SARG: Thanks!
(Sarg goes back into the bunker.
A few seconds and the lights go out. When the lights are turned back on, the Viet-cong sapper is laying on the stage just beyond the first wire. Flash comes out of the bunker.)
FLASH: Man! I'm tired. I don't think I slept all night.

MITCH: You going to be able to pull your guard?
FLASH: Yeah! I'll be okay, just give me a minute to wake up.
MITCH: You know about firing the M-79?
FLASH: YEAH! I got it. You can go on to bed now, I'm awake.
MITCH: Okay, see you in a few.
(Mitch enters the bunker. Flash walks back and forth yawning and stretching, trying to fight sleep. TheViet-cong (Sapper) crawls slowly between the wires.)
FLASH: Damn I'm tired.
(He jogs in place.)
FLASH: I better check the fifty. I bet no one has.
(He sits behind the machine gun. His head nods and with one arm over the gun and he falls asleep. The sapper sneaks closer to the bunker. He is positioned at the center of the bunker. He makes a few quick moves crawling all the time. He stops in front where Flash is sleeping. The sapper gets on his knees, takes the charge from around his neck, stands, and is about to throw it in the bunker.
Bang! the fifty fires one shot and the sapper is killed. Flash yells.)
FLASH: Thought I was sleeping, didn't you? HA! Fooled your ass. You don't fuck with this black boy. Bet you're sorry now? Bet you wish you stayed home.
Everyone comes out of the bunker and drops into their firing positions.
FLASH: There's a dead mother out there. That sucker thought I was sleeping, but I've been watching him for the past twenty minutes. Yeah! Yeah! He thought he was slick.
SARG: Rucker! Go out and check him. Bring back the satchel charge.
(Rucker goes over the sandbags.)
SARG: Don't take any chances. Shoot that son of a bitch and make sure he's dead.
RUCKER: Don't have to. His head's been blown away. Nothing from the neck up.
(Rucker grabs the charge and returns.)
RED: Oh God!
ANIMAL: Those fifty's do a number.
FLASH: Fucking right. I killed that sucker. Damn right I killed him. They ain't getting me. I'm going to make it home. I don't care if I got to kill every mother fucker in this country. I'll kill them all. Every man, woman, child and puppy dog.
(Flash falls to his knee crying.) "I can't kill anymore, I can't do it man!
(Sarg tries to pull him to his feet.)
SARG: It's okay, man, it's okay. You didn't kill anyone. You saved all our lives . It's okay!
RUCKER: I'll take the rest of his guard.
SARG: Thanks.
(They all help carry Flash into the bunker. The lights turn off then slowly back on. Rucker walks out from the bunker to center stage. He puts his hand above his eyes, like he is shielding them from the sun. He looks out into the audience.)
RUCKER: Damn! There is a lot of you out there. No! I ain't going to write letters or shoot my gun. I don't want you to know me. In two days I'll step on a mine; I'll beat Animal back home. Except it will be in a body bag. So I kind of got special permission to be out here. And you don't want to get to know me because I'll be gone soon. Oh hell! Don't look like that. It don't mean shit! Let me put it to you this way. World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and now this place, The Nam, and all those little skirmishes in between. Name one person that was killed, someone that ain't a relative? . . See, I thought so. That's why it don't mean shit!
But I'm going to tell you. In a few weeks these guys are going to walk into an ambush. Flash gets shot in the neck, and Sarg drags him to safety. Sarg gets shot in the leg, the hip, and the back. Ivy, no one ever sees him again. They don't know what happened to him. But I do, I can't tell you. It's against the rules. Red! That screwball hippie saves them all. He's a twenty year man but he don't know it yet. Mitch didn't get a scratch. Well, the sun's coming up now, and I can hear that chopper coming. I got to get back. Sarg sees me talking to you he'll get pissed.
He takes two steps then turns back to the audience.

RUCKER: Oh! One more thing. You won't understand it. But Sarg, Mitch, Red, and Flash if you're out there, GARRY OWENS, man! (HA HA)
A long extended laugh and a big smile.
(Rucker turns back and goes back to the bunker. All the stage lights slowly go on. The sound of the chopper gets louder. Every one comes out of the bunker. On the side of the stage a large fan off stage blows up dust to show a chopper landing. The chopper sound is loud.)
ANIMAL: I guess this is it.
SARG: Yep! Get your ass going.
(Animal slaps everyone's hand and exits into the dust. Chopper sound fades then is gone.)

SARG: Okay, ladies, let's go. We got things to do, places to go, and people to see.
(In a tired looking line they exit the stage.)

CURTAIN DROPS.

"What is Love?"
Evonne Myers

Love to me is a four-letter word that often people abuse.
Love should be taken serious, it's not just a line you use.
No. Love is something honest and great.
Love is something you appreciate.
You don't say "I love you" when you feel the heat.
You don't say "I love you" then go out and cheat.
Love is something special--that's what I've heard.
love is not just some four-letter word.

TRUST
Evonne Myers

A bond that's broken
Strings untied
One cold heart
A love that died.

Thrown from a school bus two years late
Michael O'Brien

grab me
--throw all of this down and hold on tight
I want to look around for a few seconds
just to make sure the street is as empty as I left it
I haven't wished for any company in a long time
and I'm thankful for that
remember every second of security
as she walks away because
tonight's dreams will highlight
all of my inadequcies

I waited for so long
searching every doorstep of that deserted street
but I went home alone every night
so let me know one more time
that I'm your biggest disapointment
it will help me swallow these last few pieces of pride
since I was never enough for anyone

Sweet Selfishness
Michael O'Brien

a betrayal of pure contentment
led to a back-stabbing love
thursday seems important
but it was too far gone
I took a few months to
realize what I didn't want
turned out to be everything I had feared
--and she knew it all the time
her love is a guilt-free emotion
it doesn't realize its consequences
only the selfishness is stronger
everyone knows but no one cares because
it's a sweet selfishness
and daddy's little girl gets what she
wants whenever she changes her mind
someday she'll wake up alone
perfume can't hide the stench forever
everyone loves the young and pretty
I loved the stench--I'll be the only one
I've had both sides and held on
but time has taken over
someone came along and flushed the toilet
I watched her spin around the bowl and
smiled as hope sucked her into the
plumbing and out of my life

Blue Dreams
Michael O'Brien

It's a rainy August day and
everything important has passed
look through my life to find yourself
you're behind every smile
under every friday night
and over every new girl
I'll drive home late with you by my side and
fall asleep around your waist
but

you're scaring me now
you can't call this life and ask for me
you know I can't refuse--but I won't listen
to you cry anymore
it's not fair to use me again
live with your new friends and I'll live with mine
I can't answer your question
and you don't deserve answers
through the rain I can see you running in that yellow
slicker--nothing from Wal-Mart has ever been so
unique
your basement room will always be love
and I'll never fly through these blue dreams
I can't believe I wouldn't want you back
I just don't recognize you anymore
that curly haired girl I left a long time ago

Captured-recorded-abandoned
Michael O'Brien

Reach far out
and grab her
try to hold on
(never rewind
her time
neverfallbehindneverfallbehind)
make sure to mark this page
so you don't lose track
things can get complicated
(when blue eyes betray)

A Small Wonder
Jeff Overcase

Two large hands hold one small child,
A whole life, a whole future, in one palm.

Smooth, perfect skin that has experienced nothing;;
Lines and wrinkles show all that's been done.

A fragile baby who cannot lift her head;
Strong fingers that can lift her world.

So much life that lies ahead;
So much life that has been lived.

The Dark Side of the Moon
Carrie Pelton

A glance at the sky
reveals only a crescent tonite
So much in the darkness
In the unknown
Without light

Tomorrow
Will show no more
Tomorrow
Will bring more
Understanding

Soon there is
Almost complete illumination
To clear my thoughts
And brighten my nights

When all is resolved
A face smiles down at me
Everything seems clear now
I can see all

But I am forgetting
Everything isn't
What it seems to be
Everything can never be
Completely understood

There will always be one
Dark side of the moon
Where answers
Unwilling to be discovered
Will hide

Hair
Lark Rains

I used to tell you
(when it was short)
I love your hair
Don't let it grow.

You know the stigma
Linked to long-
Alternative, new wave -a bit odd

All the old ladies
will talk, whisper
and gossip
What will be thought?

It grew long.
And in some strange way
You seem more intellectual
and suave

A grandma saw you
the other day
"Oh what pretty hair"
She squealed
Her shaky hands
stroked your curly locks

It keeps growing
Longer every day.

Yes, the old women talk
Whisper and gossip too
They wish their hair was long and dark
Instead of fake and blue.

The Gospel According to Softy
John J. Softcheck

"No way." Ken shakes his head. "That's just Catholic guilt."

But it's true. If there's a God, I mean, if there's any kind of truth to all that stuff in the Bible, I'm screwed. No two ways about it. If there's one thing that's made absolutely clear it's that those who go to heaven are those who follow the scripture, who follow the teachings of Christ unquestioningly and who devote their entire lives to God. I don't think I've devoted my entire life to anything but myself.

"But you're no worse than the rest of the world," my friend says comfortingly.

Maybe not, but then most everyone will be joining me in hell. It even says so in the New Testament. The funny thing is, I should be suprised by the number of chosen few that I've met in my lifetime. If you think of all the people that have ever or will ever live, and compare that with the figurative 144,000 that are supposed to make it through the pearly gates, what are the odds that you'd ever meet one of those people in your lifetime? Abysmally small right? But I've never heard of or met anyone who's seen a funeral where the deceased was expected to be suffering eternal damnation. The priest is always going to be around assuring everyone that he or she is 'in a better place' or 'with God'. The truth is, if the Bible is really accurate, or even approximately correct, most of those people are being turned away by St. Peter.

And it's these kind of thoughts that are going to get me ranked with the lost souls. I didn't just stray from the flock. I decided I didn't want to be a sheep. After 12 years of Catholic education, and a lifetime in an Irish Catholic family, I can tell you that's a big no-no in the eyes of the Almighty.

"But God doesn't want you to just blindly follow him." Ken protests. "He wants you to do what you think is right."

I beg to differ. From what I can gather, a sheep is exactly how the Big Guy wants us to be. We're supposed to trust in the Lord, right? He'll take care of us. He's right no matter what. If we don't understand something, it's because we stupid humans can't understand the plans of a god. Makes sense...sort of.

"But think of it from His perspective, if you can. God is everywhere, all seeing, all knowing, etc."

So what? I mean, he can do anything, sure, but what's the point? It's just Him, and his angels, in all his infinite glory. Well I'm no god, but I'm guessing that routine has to get stale pretty quick.

So he makes the universe: cool. Now what? Gotta fill it with something, right? Sure. No sense in having a universe unless there's something in it. Now he makes the planets and stars and nebulas and all kinds of neat shit. Great. Nice place to visit, but I wouldn't want to live there. Too lonely. So, in his infinite wisdom, he makes people. He makes them walk around, makes them climb trees and do all kinds of wacky things to entertain him. But what fun is that really? He has to give them free will, so he doesn't know what they're going to do next. Make it more interesting. But he can't have them all off doing their own thing, so he gives them religion. Makes some of the prophets to tell the other hairless monkeys about Him and all His greatness. Pretty selfish if you ask me.

A dangerous thing to say to his face, I realize, but think about it...Worship me because I made the world and since I gave you a choice, do

things my way or I'll punish you forever. What a shaft! I mean, what's the sense of calling it *free* will if you punish people who don't agree with you? We pathetic mortals figured out 200 years ago that punishing people for not agreeing with you is wrong.

So screw it, I say. If he wants to be God and punish me for living life on my terms, let him. He may have given me life, but now that it belongs to me, I intend to use it as I see fit. If he doesn't like it, I'll sit in hell for all eternity, knowing that I acted according to my beliefs and refused to live by someone else's rules. It may seem less noble at that point, and I may just change my mind, but then that's why confessions made under duress don't count in this country either.

And God, if you disagree with this, call me, we'll talk.

Nails
John J. Softcheck

Chest forward, head up, solemn but comfortable expression. Each movement powerful, purposeful, casual-I close the door, making sure not to check and see who's come in yet.

I turn and find the room still empty. I am once again, the first to arrive. The lights are off and early afternoon sunlight filters in from the east window. The classrooms of Burrill Hall are a dusty gray-green and of the same shape on every level. The instructor's large wooden desk is situated along the wall, so the thirty-odd seats all face the wider of the two chalkboards. Professor McCloud like to write a lot of diagrams to illustrate his topic.

I walk to the back of the room and hang up my coat. It's a brown duster, real buffalo skin, and falls all the way back to my ankles. It's too large to put on the back of my chair. It's also too heavy to wear for the hour I spend in here every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon, so I just hang it up. I know it's a bit much for early spring, but when I put it on I feel different. Stronger. More confident. It puts me in the right frame of mind.

I sit down and pull my sketchbook from the brown leather sidebag. Technically it's my Biology 304 Notebook, but in reality it's my sketchbook. I put my feet up on the chair in front of me and flip through the pages, starting at the first entry: January 15.

By the time I reach February 6 people start filtering in, sometimes in twos or threes but mostly alone. McCloud walks in, carrying his large briefcase, as I write today's date on a fresh page. He's a tall man, maybe six-one. I think he's in his fifties or maybe sixties. "Good Morning, friends." he says, with just a trace of his Scottish accent. "I'm glad we could all make it today. Shall we begin?". He says this first thing every day. I know because this is the one class I manage to make it to on time, early even. My other instructors would be positively astonished.

The clock on the wall says it's ten minutes into the lecture. I start to get that familiar twinge-maybe she's not coming. But then I reassure myself. Every day she comes in at twelve or thirteen after, just about the time I'm convinced she decided to ditch lecture that day. When McCloud writes something on the board I take notes, but mostly I watch the door. I keep my feet up on the chair in front of me because it helps me relax. I have my glasses on now, so I can see what McCloud is writing, but if I hear the doorknob turn I can have them off before the door is open.

It's twelve-fourteen, and I've resigned myself to the fact that she's not coming. I dig my pen into the scarred wooden desk and read the graffiti:

Kim Luv's Mike; Greeks Suck dick;
Aaron Menier is a fag; Honcho Overload

I hear the doorknob turn and look up just in time to see her walking in. She has a different look today: a stretch knit top that doesn't quite reach her waist, and a faded pair of blue jeans with the wide cuffs. They're not quite bellbottoms though. She has her tan boat shoes on instead of the heavy brown hiking shoes. I saw her wear this outfit on the first day of class. Since then it's been some color of loose-fitting jeans and a matching plaid flannel shirt over a tank top. So far I've counted seven different flannels, all with that patented little loop in the back which doesn't seem to have a purpose. She has at least four different colors of jeans, and a black leather jacket for when it's cold out. She takes her seat in the far

right column - one row in front of me, which is cool since it's no fun staring at the back of her head for an hour.

I was so thrown by the different outfit that I completely forgot to drop my glasses down on my bag. They're still open in my hand, so I close the bottom arm with index finger and chew on the top one. It's easy to appear contemplative when I chew on the top arm gently, and occasionally run the end along my lower lip, or use it to brush the hair out of my eyes. for all I know it makes me look stupid, but I feel the need to move, to do something, and nervous fidgeting seems unlikely to score any smoothness points.

By now I've given up on McCloud's lecture. He's discussing menstrual cycles, I think, but I've stopped taking notes and started sketching. I've gotten much better at it since the beginning of the semester. I've only wasted two lines of the page with notes, so I decide to use all the space and make a really good-sized profile of her. I start with her hair, since it gives me the general shape of her face. It's a deep brown, sort of a wood brown but it has all these highlights running through it. Her hair runs over halfway down her front and back, and sort of fills out as it flows. She has massive bangs. They'd fall down past her chin, but she pushes them to the side, all except for this one thick lock of hair she never moves. It just rest on her cheek, mostly concealing her left eye. Sometimes I think it's that stray lock of hair which keeps her from noticing that I'm sketching her. I try to be really casual about it and not draw attention to myself, but she must think I make constant mistakes as I write because I'm always erasing what I just 'wrote'. Actually, I'm correct, trying to get what's on the page to match what I see.

The hair is easy, and I move on to eyebrows and ears. Her brows are a slightly lighter shade than her hair, but easy to draw because they curve so smoothly in the shape of her face. He ears are the most perfect shape: small, but with good-sized bottom lobes. Those ears were designed with kissing in mind.

She has brown eyes, but they're a much darker color than her hair. If they were any darker it wouldn't even be a color, they'd just be black. Most people think that's creepy, but if you actually see it, the effect is really stunning. No matter what I'm drawing, I have to keep checking her eyes once in awhile to make sure she hasn't noticed.

Once or twice when I wasn't sketching her, I've notice her look this direction, which is really odd because usually the only thing to my left is a blank wall, the same as every other part of every wall, and not all too interesting. But it really must fascinate her because she'll look over this way every once in awhile. It kind of scares me because even when I'm not sketching her I can't help but steal an occasional glance, just to keep her image fresh in my mind. It terrifies me to think of what might happen if I stole a glance while she was looking at the wall, and her gaze met mine. Those eyes are huge, just fucking huge, and so beautiful with thick lashes that naturally curl back. Sometimes, if the light catches them at the right angle, they sparkle like the sun. If my gaze ever met hers, I doubt I could just look away casually. I'd probably freeze up, choke. I'd never be able to hide my interest in her. She'd see right through any front I put up.

I spend some time on her eyes, getting them just right, and move on to her nose. It took me two months to get that nose right. I must have screwed up over two hundred different sketches before I finally broke down and just started drawing noses. Three pages of noses, before I could get it. She doesn't have a pointy, pretentious nose. And it isn't quite a round nose or a flat, pug nose. If I had to put a label on it I'd call it an unintrusive nose, because it doesn't interfere with her other, more attractive features. It's probably the only kind of nose that would look right on such a remarkable silhouette.

After her nose I outline her chin and set the cheeks. She doesn't have the high cheekbones supermodels and really gorgeous women are supposed to have, and I love that. Her face is so comfortable to look at. No sharp edges or angles, just gentle curves and shades.

I always draw her lips last, because they're my favorite feature. She has unbelievably full lips. The kind some African women have, but even bigger. I'm not sure if she uses lipstick or not, but her mouth is like pink satin. I wonder as I draw what it must be like to kiss those kips, to run your finger across them. Someone knows; there is no question in

my mind of that. And that's when I can almost hear the Devil himself on my shoulder ask "How much would you give?" To kiss those huge, plush lips just once, just for a moment, what would I give? I think the better question would be " What wouldn't I give?". What sacrifice would be too much, too great. How much suffering would I have to endure before I'd say, "Okay, forget it. It's not worth it just to kiss her for two seconds." I can't imagine anything not being worth those two seconds.

It's strange how easily I can draw her face like this in class. I've tried late at night, in my room when I can't sleep. But the image I see in my mind never matches what's on the paper. Her lips are never soft enough, cheeks too high, her eyes too small. But in class I can take the time to correct, to go back and change things. Add things. New features, nuances, of her face, appear every time I sketch her. When I flip through my sketchbook I can see things in the later pictures, depth and substance, that was lacking at first.

Once the face is done, her body is simple. Her clothes are usually casual enough to hide the sculpted form beneath. The stretch sweater however, bulky material and all, manages to outline her firm and curvy figure perfectly. Precisely. It reveals just enough of her stomach to show how much work she really does on herself. A stomach like that doesn't come from sitting on the couch all day watching soaps. I'd wager high-impact aerobics three days a week, alternated with running for a few hours on the armory track.

I add in a desk and notepad for reference and move on to her hips and legs, for some reason I have the habit of drawing them too long, like birds legs. I erase and try again. They're long, but not unusually so. She's tall, at least five ten or eleven, but her body is very evenly spaced out, so she isn't at all awkward like some tall girls. Her legs are firm, definitely skater's legs. Or maybe dancer's legs. Even her ankles are attractive; they aren't bony or pale. Every inch of her is smooth and tight, nothing there that isn't needed. I have an especially good view of her legs because she sticks them out in the aisle facing me, crossing them at the ankles.

I add in her arms and have her cradling the notepad in her right forearm, since she's a lefty like me. The arms are easy to draw, but her hands take a little time. I can't make the fingers too long or too wide, even the skin of her hand is smooth and tight. Only a few slight wrinkles in the knuckles. It takes a few tries, but I've learned to sketch lightly and fill in later so that mistakes don't show.

I stop for a moment and look over my work. It's taken me almost a half hour, but overall I'm pretty happy with it. Her face has life and expression, and her pose is natural, but it's not quite complete. There's just one more thing to add, and it's finished.

Her fingernails.

I distinctly remember her nails being the feature that made me first notice her. I was sitting one row up, right next to her, and caught her scribbling out of the corner of my eye. I got just a glimpse of her hand, and I had to take a better look. Her nails were long, so impossibly long. I couldn't help staring. I was mesmerized by the way they glided across the page as she wrote. I've never seen nails that color; blood red. Deep crimson red. The color of a heart. They must be razor sharp. I think they could cut through steel. I've dreamed of her a few times. Dreamed of her holding my face in her hands, about to kiss me. Her face is never quite right in the dream either, but the hands are so vivid. I can feel them on my cheek, and just before she kisses me, the nails begin to cut through my skin, tearing the flesh with ease, and I wake up in a sweat-feeling my face for blood or wounds.

Every time I try to draw those nails, they come out wrong. Looking like claws or talons. Like the nails of a witch or demon. Her nails just don't fit with the rest of her. They clash with her aura of casualness. I decide to try something different. I erase the nails altogether and give her short ones, with clear polish. I add in a hazy background and put in more detail. I hold it away from me a little and turn it slightly. It fits. The no-nails look fits with the rest of her, but it's not quite right. It's just not her, almost, but not quiet. She needs the nails somehow. I look at the clock and decide to gather up my stuff and try again on Thursday.

Fear
John Softcheck

The darkness outside.
The burning inside

Distant.

Alone.

The cold of a toilet seat on a winter morning.
The cold of the tub on my back.
Anger. Hatred. Regret.
All forced inward, tearing at the heart.
Until it bursts, exploding with the force
of a thousand cannons, into an empty mask.

A Walk In The Sun
Robin Sutton

You won't believe what I saw today.
A pretty little girl and her dog at play.
They both were smiling, running around.
I couldn't help watching. I felt like a clown.
The girl was clad in her Sunday best.
I thought it odd she act with such zest.
I sat there and stared for what seemed like an hour.
But couldn't have felt more refreshed with a shower.
She opened my heart, of that I am sure.
For today was disease and she the cure.

Evening Dancer
Christine Ward

The evening dancer
breathes in the night
blowing stardust
glimmering light

Footsteps prancing
upon the stars
brushing Venus
leaping to Mars

Jupiter's moon
upon her fingertips
red sun fire
colors her lips

Waltzing around
the sky with grace
Evening dancer
draped in lace

Native Southwest
Christine Ward

The beauty of desolation
delivering true freedom
Tall, flattened plateaus
hold up the turquoise sky.
Colorful canyons carved in time
cradle the dwellings of a native land.
Statuesque Shiprock formations
mystically await the medicine man.
Tribal hunt with feathered arrow
offer peace from the Chief.
Vision quest upon the ridge
Ancestors whisper with the wind.
Divine, elegant eagle flying free,
Again, the Southwest beckons me.

Take Me Back
Christine Ward

take me back...

to the aquarium
the night we fell in love
When all the stars were watching
from a dreamland up above

Where the city lights reflected
on Lake Michigan below
And fisherman of the evening
Watched our affection glow

We never had to talk too much
about the way we felt
I only had to look your way
to feel my body melt

That love has grown much fonder
over the last ten years
I long for the day that we reunite
when the air around us clears

Until that day I'll think of you
and keep my thoughts intact
back to the aquarium
where we made our silent pact

Thinking of Daddy
Christine Ward

I have seen pictures in black and white, now yellowed from time, pictures of a happy, smiling, healthy baby boy. His soft, fine hair reflects the photographer's lights. One amused eyebrow is raised higher than the other. This baby, with dimpled hands, is an absolute delight to adore. Other photos, of this same child, at the age of four, reveal a playful boy riding his tricycle and another, in the saddle of a pony, with his younger sister in tow. Later in life, that pleasant smile would begin to fade.

At the time those moments were frozen, it was unknown that my father's father had Multiple Sclerosis. Shortly thereafter, the Grandfather I would never come to know, was absolutely bedridden with his crippling disease. Daddy and his sister were called home from second grade and kindergarten, respectively, to care for their father while his Mother went to work. Grandpa died when Daddy was only eleven years old.

To help pay the bills, Grandmother had taken in boarders. They came and went over the years, until Grandmother remarried. The boarders, unfortunately, had already left their marks. I can't understand why a "man" would repeatedly beat the piss out of a young boy. Why would a Mother allow this to happen to her own flesh and blood? The bitch should of stopped him. She never earned the title "Mother" in my eyes. The severe beatings continued on after she married Daddy's stepfather. Daddy had perfected his rash, smart-ass mouth. With a genius I.Q., words and come-backs came effortlessly. Daddy was even allowed to skip half of a grade in school. I would say that the bastards were, more than likely, intimidated by this. The abuse escalated: thrown down the stairs, brow cut open, forced to walk to the doctor's in the cold winter's snow. The Doctor was called by his stepfather, and instructed to use no anesthetic for the stitches. A fork was impaled into his sister's hand by the same demon, for reaching across the table.

Daddy found it thrilling to wreck havoc onto others, greasing the cable car rails at the top of the hill, watching it slowly slipping to a halt, then flying back downward past the bottom: his all-time favorite scene.

From being an actor in plays, to the R.O.T.C., into the Army, he immediately became Sergeant, a naturally talented leader. While surveying in Germany, Daddy had many a maiden. There were countless friendly frauleins for the handsome, blue-eyed American lightweight champion. He would buy rubbers a gross at a time.

After the service, Daddy became a fireman for the Santa Fe, his true love. Daddy began collecting model trains and railroad memorabilia. He soon married my Mother and had two children, my sister and me. Daddy and Mom even bought us a gas-powered ride-on train that circled around our almost dandelion-free yard. Daddy would pay my sister and me a penny for each dandelion, complete with root and all, that we had pulled. Daddy, always the engineer, with a beer in one hand and a cigarette in the other, merrily gave us rides. Around and around the yard we would go, imagining the deck as a bridge and the stairs as the ticket booth, going fast down the Western line, slowly climbing the Eastern line slope. For Christmas, Daddy and Mom bought us a Mighty Casey Train Set to ride around our basement.

Always telling a joke, tickling us until we would scream with uncontrollable laughter, cuddling us, then holding us under the flatulent sheets, and always giving us a quarter to rub his stiff, aching back-we all knew that Daddy loved us whole-heartedly, even though he never spoke the words, "I love you," as much as Mom did. Now I realize that he never heard those kind, reassuring words much as a child. The love he needed and deserved did not come from his selfish mother. She, instead, encouraged him to drink the liquor he later became dependent upon. My functioning alcoholic father

called it a day of work at 1:00 P.M., when he would begin his daily jog from tavern to tavern. This time would get earlier as he aged.

Daddy's mother died on my sister's thirteenth birthday. And so it was, that Daddy and I sat, without a tear, the day she left this world. I don't know if he ever did cry. My cousins called her "Cramma," when she was alive. She never gave a damn whether we visited or not,"Just make sure you don't mess up her house." My cousin, Scotty, once was holding the wall, as his crippled legs barely carried him to the other room. "Get your filthy hands off my walls!" Not a tear out of me for Her Wickedness on that day of farewell.

Daddy felt the need to indulge in women again, leaving us behind. Mom, sadly, had to have him leave. No more trips to the greenhouse on Sundays, no more Dog & Suds. I felt sorry for Daddy, and I thought I should live with him, so he didn't have to be alone. Daddy's comfort was booze. He never once skipped out on child support, nor did he fail to pick us up every Tuesday, when we would visit his stepfather, the only paternal grandfather I knew.

Daddy found another wife, giving me nine instant stepbrothers and sisters, a terrific treat for a girl with only one sibling. My sister gave him his first blood-related grandchild twelve years ago, a darling girl. Five years later, I would give him his first grandson, whose eyes are a window into which I look and see my Dad. When my second child was due, four days before his own birthday, he told me to cross my legs and wait. i decided to give him a Hell of a present that year, so I did. On Daddy's birthday, I stopped crossing my legs and gave him another grandson. Their names appear together every year on their cake. My Son and my Dad are "soul mates," I say to Dad. My son is a carbon copy of him, in the face , and in personality. Look out world! Last year I gave him a third grandson, but this time I could not fulfill his wishes and hold out the extra month and a half until his birthday! It is all right, though, because this one looks like his" Pa-Pa," too.

Daddy's heart needed to be fixed two times now, and it appears that it may need another adjustment. His liver warned him about the alcohol, too, but Daddy doesn't listen. I just want him to get perfectly well, so he can see his eleven grandchildren get married, and he can become a Great-Grandpa. I wish I could see his life mend itself and watch the scars disappear. I may be close to thirty years now, but no matter what age I am, I will always look at him with merriment, remembering all the joys he gave me, and I see him as my Daddy.

Loss of Faith
Judy Bond

We wear gray today
and drag our feet
across the tiled piazza.
Our slow progression
moves without sound
toward the fat stone church.
We do not look up
or to our sides;
our thoughts are to be
directed by Goodness;
we must meditate on holy things
as a group.
There is power in our prayer
humility in our loss of self.
I am distracted now and then-
a devil uniquely mine
breathes a cold sigh
on my neck
sings a promise softly
in my ear.
I listen
then carry my sin
past thick wooden doors
into God's house
where the priest reminds us
that there are no secrets here.
"Dominus vobisum," he chants.
I think, for a second,
there might be hope...

but even then
I knew.

Overripe
Judy Bond

I've forgotten tomorrow;
the day's name is a memory
of something sensed once,
brought back in the mind only
as a recreated sound
or an internal fragrance
that tries to echo the original...
I am pulled backward, pushed forward
like a child in a London Bridge cage of arms
lock me up
I'm confused about directions
of past and future:
every step is both regress and progress
entrance, exit.
I would scream a prayer to invisible gods
if it would help
if it would erase tomorrow's parade
into the past
when brass was gold
and drums rolling in my belly
were mere magic

In Fragrant Delicious
Judy Bond

Our legs
silkly glide calf over thigh
this side and the other
Our knees tense, then lock,
mock the languid loll
of night eyes,
rock like a tired grandma
Our toes pointed,
slowly relax, melt...
your color into mine
blue bleeding drop by drop
into red
until we're as lavender as a drawer sachet
Our legs are lace
ribbon
fragrant

The Night the Monsters Got Rosie
Judy Bond

The night the monsters
got Rosie
I was awake
shivering,
window open
because of a noise I'd heard
way way off
across the river:
maybe it was moonlight
shattering forsythia branches
or something else--
windsnarl
treegroan.
Next thing I knew
it was morning--
I wasn't there to hear mother
open the door,
whisper,
"Wake up, Rosie."

Forty Winks?
Judy Bond

Your tired eyes
half-hooded
drift left,
do not focus,
lazily slide right
without seeing.
I smile,
am not recognized
as something separate
from the sofa
or the wall.
I guess it's nice
to be trusted,
enought that you fall asleep
in the middle of the afternoon
so easily--
something you couldn't do
in company with anyone else.
But sometimes I want to tell you
that Andrew Borden
napped one afternoon.

"Is this my lot?"
Cutter

Lonesome, gnarled and twisted limbs,
Wincing at the gentle breeze
That rips the bark and pulls the leaves
From once a mighty power.

Tangled, dried and blackened sticks,
Howling at the wondrous rain
That seres the flesh in knots of pain--
Alas, the forests' father.

Now harken back to wishful days,
When dreams of grandest fashion
Fed his roots with heated passion
To become and strive and feel.

But dreams grew still with withered age.
Bitterness crept strong and dark.
"This is my lot; My life a lark;
Am I simply just a tree?"

So, waiting on the hewer's axe
To free him from his barren earth
And glow with heat in loggers hearth,
Wretched limbs are done with life.

Only Words
Cutter

I'm sure by now my words do fall
on ears as hard as stone.
I know I've said them all before;
I've broken oaths in which I've swore
to grow and change and learn,
Then left you lone once more.

You see, my love, I understand
your doubt that I can grow.
My words are thin, they're just a rhyme,
the true test will be passed through time.
But time, I fear, is short.
You've barred be from your heart.

So why then should a woman who
could clearly have the best,
trust this man, respect his claim
of love and truth and honest aim
to bear his very soul;
And then not quit again?

Everpure
Cutter

Logic is everpure,
It leaves no stone unturned
And no path untested
In search of answers sure.

My life has sought that goal--
Options weighed, choices made
Based on calculations
That factor out the soul.

But formulas do fail
In matters of the heart.
They squeeze the joy from life
And banish it to jail.

These truths, in error learned,
Have shaken me awake
And freed my heart from chains
To face the light once spurned.

Valley Hartofman
Cutter

I knew a man who travelled,
Never sure of where he'd go
Or why he wandered so,
Whose only aim
Was to remain
In motion.
Neither searching nor exploring,
He roved from sea to sea,
Never shackled, never free.
Ever drifting
Through the shifting
Sands of life.

He happened on a fellow
With wise and learned eyes
That shimmered like the skies.

Who seemed to be
A man like he,
Yet rested.
With leathered face and passioned voice
He spoke his tale of quest
For that which held the best
Of worldly things,
Like golden rings,
Man's treasure.

The sage told of a valley
Nestled 'neath a mountain range,
Holding wonders ever strange
To most of man,
Yet richer than
Ever known.
"The valley known as Hartofman
Is rich beyond compare,
With wonders oh so rare
That mortals reel
As if to feel
God", he said.

So the traveller hitched his pack
And turned, intent to go
To Hartofman, and lo--
He faltered there,
And was aware
Of his tears.
"There is no valley Hartofman"
He wailed in thick despair,
"My journey ends not there,
But here, in this
Closed abyss--
This Heart of Mine".

Treasures Lost
Cutter

The fiery sun itself,
In all its light and brillance,
Pales in contrast to your air.
The mighty winds of storms
That howl and beat the earth
Are but breezes in your hair.

A calm, still pond at sunset
Is but a fragment of the beauty
That your spirit holds.
And yes, the ocean is too shallow,
It could never hold the love let loose
From your soul as it unfolds.

And I wonder, when did I lose
Sight of the treasure
That was mine?
How could I take for granted
These glorious gifts
That men have searched for throughout time?

What could cause a person
To shun the light and breeze, the beauty and love
That you so freely gave?
And opt for darkened loneness,
(A still and rancid air)
And see not ever treasure
But imperfection everywhere?

My blindness ruined our love at last.

Now, banished to this fetid room
I grope and claw through cloudy gloom,
But sense the light and freshened air.
I tear the shackles from my heart,
And emerging I declare:
"I see you now, I feel you're there!"
Then looking round
I am aware
That all I've left is me.
For your love has left, you see.

My Rosie Dear
Cutter

My Rosie Dear
The time draws near
To venture on your own
And become a woman grown.
But before you go,
You should know
Just what you mean to me,
And how it feels to be
Your Father.

But mere words fail
To strike the nail

Of pride I feel for you,
And the gleeful things you do.
You hold zest and zeal
And I feel
You'll burst upon this world
As though you have been hurled
From starlight.

And 'tis my hope
You will not grope
With heartache or duress,
So your life may be a quest
Of good and right and pure.
And I'm sure
Your searching will bestow
A kind man who will know
Your brilliance.

And please remain
Without disdain
For that you do not know.
And in aging stretch and grow
Toward a bright star,
For you are
My shining light on high;
So know that you'll be my
Rosie Dear forever.

My Friend
Diane Kollman

Would you hold my hand tightly my friend.....
Would you give me your support and warmth my friend.....
Would you give me your love and understanding.....
Or would you just walk away.....

What I have to tell you is not pretty.....
It does not consist of white clouds and blue skies.....
It is full of black holes and a lot of grayness.....
'Cause I just found out early last week.....
That I am dying of the virus AIDS.....

Would you still hold my hand tightly my friend.....
Will you still give me your support and warmth my friend.....

Will you still give me your love and understanding my friend.....
For I am still the same person I always was.....
Or will you just get up and walk away.....

Luck for Everyday Living
Amy Lingafelter

Someone told me to

"Get Lucky"

tonight on his t-shirt.

Regarding my getting lucky tomorrow
or maybe the next day, perhaps next week,
that dollar bill dropped in
a Buddah's mouth will finally pass
through Luck's hands and
he'll consider me and my rather small request.

Luck will call me into his office
wher he sits behind a black desk,
Elvis and cigar haze power.
After a few sexually harassing comments,
he will thank me for my dollar.

I will dutifully remind him that with all
the ignored pennies, nickles, dimes
tossed from fat fingers into
mall fountains and lucky wells
I could've bought my own
Get Lucky t-shirt
and fooled everyone.
"I'm already lucky," I should be screaming.

Instead I'm pondering getting lucky in
Ireland, green island with no snakes
where I am not Catholic and I am not pretty.

I sit in the waiting room of Luck's office
on some Irish worry stone
shoving dollars into anyone's open mouth,
rereading the wrinkled magazines,
letting the Irish men tell me I'm not beautiful to them
any more.

If I'm not lucky by tomorrow, I will find
the poor man with the t-shirt (who is, no doubt, Irish)
and apologize about this poem.
I will also cut open a fat Buddah stomach and
get my dollar back.

THE WHOLE PACK OUT THE WINDOW
Amy Lingafelter

I smoke in my car driving home late at night,
and everyone who sees me sucking on fire in a white
Nissan
gasps at how untouchable I am.

Later in my pajamas, I lie in bed with ghosts
and ask then if humans will ever live on Venus.
They laugh at my proposals to colonize terrestrial
planets
and accuse me of recreating myself with herbal
cigarettes.

Ghosts leave and in the morning I wake to find
myself in the shower
feeling better about everything again.
I put clothes over a body men resignedly touch,
and in my car the morning smells like smoke
so I throw the whole pack out the window
and hope some smoker finds it so the money isn't
wasted.

I drive on into the day, and in the rearview mirror
I am ugly, so I never check for cars behind me.
I am so untouchable with the morning drifting
and more men don't look
and I'm a new me again and again.

If it's not cigarettes, it's shoes or perfume
my sleeping companions will say.
Night comes,
and I only wish for morning
and the shower
and someone deep inside who is real,
lives and breathes on Venus,
never wishes for morning,
doesn't sleep with ghosts,
and loves herself.

Manifesto
Amy Lingafelter

You called tonight
while I was sitting on my couch with him.
After I told him it was you,
he drew away.

And we looked at each other
and decided to never speak again
because he gets great sad poems
being blown by
who what when where
as I draw away.
I don't even want to know.

but you called tonight.
me on my couch
and I decided I really love him.
He (of course) screams that I don't
know what love is.
he says I don't want to love anyone.
I just want 'em all to love me.
he screams that
I blew you. I probably even said I loved you.
and the whole bit about sleeping with you --
nothing.

I've no right to complain that he's
not making this any easier,
and then to top it all off

You called tonight...
I fill your head about my burnt finger.
and perhaps I wrote this manefesto
to tell you my letter is not in the mail.
you don't have to call any more.

You called tonight
and I now realize
he is utterly painful to look at.
he is the highest mountain to climb.
He is a poster on my wall
and frames full of smiles buried
under something I knew I would never lift.

And what does he want?
A perty girl?
(we've all accepted I'm not one of those)
he wants me
and he's half-contemplating suicide about it.

I told him... nothing, he is in the dark,
but he sits on my couch much wiser than you-
he knows I'm crazy

You called tonight
and now his hands are on my waist.
You called tonight
and after talking to you
I decided I really love him,
but every last one of you makes me
wish I was a lesbian.

Amy
Amy Lingafelter

It strikes me now
that people are tied into my life
through words and when I read or hear these words,
it takes years off my life, slams off my program,
screws me over.

These words never shocked
until the people changed
weren't what they were before
and the words weren't used again,
extinct words in my every-day conversation
brought up again by the unknowing
or the radio or a book

that I don't blame or I can't blame
for slamming me off, reminding me of
changed beings, extinct people,
saying or writing words that

I can't even bring myself to write in this poem
because I refuse to screw myself over with
words tied into people tied into some things that just
don't ever come back.

The Fishwife
Maria Mellenger

Justin drinks
Miller Genuine Draft with a lemon wedge.
There's a poem in there somewhere,
I thought.
just like Kim said,
"Don't write about fisherman's sweaters.
That's mine."
This is mine:
he had to finish that Draft, down to the lemon,
Before he could say, "I have a crush on you."
I, with a ridiculous Bud Light, answered,
"You lie!"
I unraveled,
Like a big black fisherman's sweater,
Hanging on some guy I liked,
Leaving Justin somewhere,
Drinking and waiting
When my quote book read,
"Do sober
What you would have done drunk."

Because I do not know what I want.
I wanted that guy,
The dealer;
Justin calls him "your <u>friend</u>."
I wanted him
Until he sort of gave in
And yet, when he touched my hair
To say goodbye. . .
Yeah.
I have a crush on him.
Someone having a crush on me
Was not in the book.
I never wrote that chapter.
I never imagined it.
Creativity
Just hits you sometimes,
Like the strange simplicity
And utter coolness
Of eating a lemon wedge
At confession.

Justin said,
"You're so sweet and funny
And how you make me laugh. You're sexy.
How'd you get such a big butt for a white girl?"
I loaned him twenty bucks
And he kept pulling at the threads of this other guy.
I <u>taught</u> Kim how to do the cable stitch-
She can't take that from my poems:
The dealer and my idea of the dealer
Were tangled like a cable sweater,
Reality and fantasy holding hands
Over the fisherman's hook,
The salt spray of the ocean confusing what I had

created,
Dropping stitches of what was true.
Justin was that sober idea
And I
Was drunk.
The next weekend
I wanted a Miller Genuine Draft with a lemon wedge.
I wanted Justin.

Dorothy
Maria Mellenger

"Da toh nah sang ga la ta no rah tea so la tee ree,"
Dorothy said to Mrs. Tzu, in sympathy of her failed attempt
To fit in with Kansas and its church ladies and Aunty Ems.
Mrs. Tzu answered, and though Dorothy knew no Chinese,
She knew Mrs. Tzu meant, "Child, you could be mine."

Untitled
Maria Mellenger

I bought this man a bed.
In one of our real conversations,
not the ones I dream or the ones I put in my poems,
he told me he can not sleep. He has only a couch
in his new apartment, and an expensive
telescope. I have never been there,
but I imagine his empty rooms,
how he wanders, insomniac, peeks at the stairs,
rereads the story I wrote for him and photocopied
from the magazine - maybe it hangs on his wall.
I don't imagine he thinks of me.
He's not like me.
But then the idea slipped over me like a pillowcase;
I knew he had one simple need I could fill.

Ring Lardner's Haircut
Maria Mellenger

Virginia Woolf entered my stream of consciousness and spoke of how silly my new life was: "It's all been done before." Lately I've felt pieces of this life falling from me, as if I couldn't find my way. As if the breadcrumbs leading to the confessional were left to allow the birds to enter and feed.

Joyce Carol Oates wrote: "Marya knew that her primary weakness, her primary sin, was being sarcastic: that penchant for irony (for being a "smart aleck," others would of said) that lost her so many friends. . . She said airily, provocatively, Oh hell, it already has, but here I am, see?- still breathing."

And: "Marya's hair fell to her waist in glossy waves, a thick dark mane that looked black in some lights, chestnut-brown in otheres, and though she privately knew herself ugly her hair was beautiful."

They pronounce my name Marya, you know. Wouldn't this caption be so much more fitting than an author's photo in a black turtleneck and a serious look, like Li-Young Lee's faraway glance (how presumptuous-looking ahead to anthologies, thinking, "I'll be read before Woolf. I'll be read before Oates.") on the back of his collection Rose? Lee read to us at a poetry workshop. He sounded just like his photo.

Oates ends Marya's story: "panting grunting Lester brought the blades of the shears up against the nape of her neck, as close to her skull as he could manage, and began cutting."

"This is hardly stream of consciousness," Virginia scolds. "Look at that spot on the sloppy plasterboard of your apartment. It's not a mark on the wall but it will have to do."

When I was fifteen on a field trip to a museum, the sliced bodies encased in glass sent our group into wild pubescent laughter. It was not the liver, thinly placed in plastic like the meat in the supermarket, nor was it any other organ arranged for scientific study or industry, as it were. It was the few pubic hairs that inevitably clung to the skin that remained in that general area. we probably didn't have pubic hairs yet. I don't remember. those glass cases were on a wall. I couldn't climb past the humor of my colleagues. When I did, much later, and declared myself well read, they resented me.

Oh, my friends. Where have you gone? I'm not Li-Young Lee (who, when signing an autograph

for me, could not even lower his eyes to my name tag
that read Maria in such admiration). I am not Woolf.
I am not Oates, who asked, "Where are you going,
where have you been?" but I've mentioned that
before, haven't I? You cut my hair off inch by inch
with your cruelty.

coffeebarfly
Maria Mellenger

"I'm going to tell you something.
Sometimes I get so sad
I want to drive to the south side,
where all the funky neighborhoods are,
and order coffee in dirty restaurants,
overcrowded bars, empty bus stations,
twenty-four hour hot dog stands,
cheap bakeries that don't even have signs
or sell bread, street vendors,
vandalized machines;
I want to drink and drink
and think
until the caffeine makes me dizzy
and I drive home drunk,
and no officer anywhere can give me a DUI."

Radiant With Surprises
Maria Mellenger

"Hi! I haven't seen you in so long," he said.
He was surprised. He hadn't seen anyone from the
hospital.
"How are you?" His lips stretched over his teeth
like cellophane about to tear and spoil the leftovers.
"Honest," she answered. "How are you?"
"Radiant with suprises," he felt like laughing,

"I have a print job. The Laughing
Paper, we're called. All in good humor. Everything
said
with an ironic smile, a fearless frivolity. You?"
But he did not laugh. After the hospital
he went home and sat with his TV and leftovers,
his breakdown still a fuzzy film on his teeth,
something he ran his tongue over daily, those teeth.
"I hang out at the comedy club," he imagined
laughing.
"I see all the new acts, not the leftovers.
I'm on the cutting edge, even in leiasure. They said
I belong there." He didn't say this either. The hospital
was his only happiness. It was like the beeper you

find on a dead drug dealer, calling you
to the scene of the crime, calling home as his teeth
touch the pavement, beeping even on the ride to the
hospital.
It said, "With me you belong," laughing,
and seeing her reminded him that the shrink said
our lives are one piece of fabric, torn leftovers

like a crazy quilt, scraps and leftovers
like in our grandmother's basket. The challenge you
face is sewing them all together. What was said
sewn to what was done, tongue to teeth,
great periods of tears and confession to laughing,
laughing, with girls in the smoking lounge at the
hospital.

He was surprised. He hadn't seen anyone from the
hospital.
Like cellophane about to tear and spoil the leftovers
he split the sentence. "I'm radiant with suprises. I'm
laughing."
"Honest?" she asked him. "How are you?"
"How are you. . . ?" His lips stretched over his teeth.
"I haven't seen you in so long," he said.

"I'm sad," he said. "And you?"

"Me, too."

In the Wake of My Youth
Andrew Neill

Great storms generate enormous swells on the ocean
soul.

Wind whipped memories drive tears horizontal.

White caps of emotions crash down upon feeble bow
and stern anger rises up against gales of
uncertainty.

The winds subside as hope bobs on yet churning waters.

have faith, a placid calm besets a tormented soul
and peace spreads out like polished glass in all directions.

breathing deep, I catch my breath
and submerge into the abyss below.

Contents Under Pressure
Andrew Neill

The hardened steel cylinder of my exterior
conceals the vulnerable contents of my soul.

The extremes of social temperature threaten to explode.

Agitated and disturbed the hardened steel container conceals
the vulnerable contents of my soul.

Abuse and misuse threaten to puncture re-enforced exteriors
as the soft and foamy inside settles to the bottom.

Contents under pressure.

The hardened steel container conceals the contents of our souls.

Erasing the Chalk Board
Andrew Neill

Fine clouds of dust have finally settled
on the chalk ledge of the future.

Lines of wisdom once traced in chalk
replaced by the magic marker.

Sleek lines of blue on white
dry fast on the history of white powder.

Will children know the lessons that lay in the chalk tray
now holding the marker?

And what of the day when we clapped and played
as our memories drift away in clouds of fine white powder?

Spent
Nels Nelson

Remember that kiss I gave to you
Before you left last summer,
And which you passed on
To a guy in New York?
A girl gave it back to me last night,
All worn and holey, like a pair
of old gym shoes.
After traveling around the world
From lip to lip,
The feeling that was wrapped inside
When i first gave it to you
Died from overuse.
It was like kissing a dirty sock.

Definition
Nels Nelson

A motorcycle-man
Told me that love
Is when you care about
A woman
as much as you care about
Your bike.

Twilight
Beata M Parsons

Tonight was the night. She couldn't keep from shaking. Her skin prickled at the thought. Tonight was the night. Tonight she would be herself. Tonight she would be held. Tonight she would be loved. Tonight was the night. Tonight.

She took a sip of the brandy she held. She couldn't take her eyes off of the foyer. He would be walking through there any minute. He was always late and she was always early. Always. Every year. She anticipated this night almost as soon as it was over. Every year, the same night, the same time, they met. It was more than tradition. More than a ritual. It was their life blood. They survived the year because of this one night.

He strode through the foyer with all the confidence of a man who knew what to expect. A man who had confidence. He spotted her instantly. She always waited in the same spot. her heart leapt at the sight of him. She felt like a young school girl who was experiencing her first crush. Tonight was the night. Tonight she would be in his arms. Tonight she would forget all about her world. Tonight.

He strode over to her. His long legs swiftly covered the ground. Before she could stand he had her in his arms. he crushed his lips to hers and her body went limp. Tonight. They had promised each other that they wouldn't speak. There was to be no catching up, no memories, no regrets. Only tonight. When he released her from his tight embrace, she could feel her heart pounding against her chest. It was good to be in his arms again. He had aged. There were lines around his eyes that were not there last year. She wondered what his life had been like this past year. What was it that had put those lines there? As she walked next to him to their room, she remembered the night they met. It was very much like tonight, only it was ten years ago. She was staying at this very same hotel while visiting relatives. She had been at the bar when he walked in. He took her breath away then, just as he did now. He was handsome, debonair, sophisticated. He was meeting clients, yet he couldn't keep his eyes off of her either. After his clients left, he made his way towards her. He was not the shy type. He bought her a drink and they immediately hit it off. They spent the entire night talking. Then, just after midnight, the truths came out. He was married. She was engaged.

It should have ended there. They should have said their good-byes and been on their ways to their separate rooms. But that is not what the stars had in store for them. They were meant to meet. Their attraction was mutual; it was strong, and it was undeniable. A force had brought them together, and it wasn't going to let them go. Then, at a quarter past one, they realized that it was more than physical attraction. They were one together. Despite their separate responsibilities, despite their previous commitments and devotions, despite everything they could control, they fell in love.

They spent the night together. It was sheer agony in the morning when they had to part. He was scheduled to return home that morning, to return to his wife and child. They spent the early part of the morning in each other's arms, willing the hours to pass slowly. They knew they could not be together. They had other commitments. yet they knew that they had to see each other again. So that morning, in the dawn's early glow, they promised to meet every year in this very same hotel, at the very same time. They promised not to ask any questions; it would hurt too much to know too much. And if either should not show in any given year, it would be over. They would not continue the relationship the following year or the year after. It would be done. They didn't exchange phone numbers or addresses. They felt that if what they shared was real they would need no reminders. No reminders except for their memories.

Tonight was the night. He slid the key into the lock and they slipped into the darkness of the room. Tonight. She was aware of every sound in the dark room. She could hear the click of the keys as he placed them on the bureau. She could hear him take his coat off. She could hear her heart pounding in her ears. They held each other for the first few minutes. That was tradition. She felt his hard muscles under his shirt. She stood there taking everything in. The way his stubble rubbed her cheek, how he smelled of cologne and brandy. She felt him press his lips to her neck. Once again, they were one. Tonight they would be together. Tonight their lives would be perfect. Slowly, feeling each other, memorizing their movements, they began their dance. Tonight. They would make love. They would express a pure, gentle love of each other. Tonight.

Tonight. She woke in the early morning. She smiled remembering. Then, tears came to her eyes. He was gone. He had left just before dawn as he did for the past ten years. Her tears were not of

loss or regret. Her tears were of joy. her tears were of anticipation. There was always next year. Through her tears she noticed a rose. It was on his pillow. He had always left something for her. Every year it was something small, yet this was the first time he had ever left a flower. The rose was a deep red, almost an unnaturally deep shade with the thorns removed. As she picked up the delicate flower, she gasped. There, under the flower, on the pillow, on pale cream stationery, was a note. He had broken the rules! They were not to communicate in any way! With a shaky hand, tears still coming, she picked up the note. She was afraid. She was afraid of what it might say. They had not communicated in ten years. What did he have to say after all these years? Through the tears she began to read...

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!
UNTIL NEXT YEAR,
I WILL ALWAYS LOVE YOU.

Then, for the first time in ten years, she sobbed. She cried for the days lost between their meetings, for the words never spoken, for their lives not shared. She had held him so close to her heart that it finally bled. How ironic, she thought, the rose without thorns had torn her heart. At that moment she knew. Last night had been their last. Twilight had finally come...

Ovum
Savini

Smoke,
rising
from the incense stick,
rising
like horns
dirty white,
in the forest
I play my pan flute
for the love of the moon,
and she is coming down
to find me.
The smoke is rising
like blood to my temples.
And my pretty goddess
is kissing me in ways
that make me blush,
that make me flush.
I'm positively pink,
ruddy from the pumping
in my chest,
swooning from the smoke
blurring my vision.
Backwards.
Falling, flailing
backwards
into bed,
never as graceful as I remember.
She rises and swells,
an ovum in the womb of God
she pulses.
In a sky of starry faces,
she is the closest.
She is mine.

Villanelle From Hell
John Stobart

Oh hell, I moan and know I know no more.
And sense no sense in what or how or why
Or whom or where shall never ever score
My mind and heart go dancing around the floor
Pursued by hounds whose yapping sounds won't die
Oh hell, I moan and know I know no more.
Suspecting worse awaits behind that door
I race up stairs and try to climb the sky
But then or there shall never ever score
And cancer lurks in liver raw and sore
And champs and savors rank disorder high.
Oh hell, I moan and know I know no more.
Oh demons love to see my hidden lore
And hate to let my secrets simply lie
But hear! My here shall never ever score.
My devil grieves and cheers galore
At thought of future failures by and by.
Oh hell, I moan and know I know no more
And hear my here shall never ever score.

Entropy 33 (3rd star to the 3rd power)
John Stobart

Dimensions oracularly ovular
Specific gravity dense
Be-all-end-all sensation
Mercurial
Dizzy and tense

Anti-fibrilating
By comparison
Childlikely bland
Alternatively polygot
Irrationally I stand

I roll leftrightly upanddown
Diagonal
Pinballic megadimensioning
Acceleration sluggish
Breathless and atonal

Solarity finished
Nonsense refined
Or reprised
May the new game begin
Tradition defined

Morning Prayer While Staring at the Headboard
Februrary 28
Carla Taylor

The clock reads 6:53. What a coincidence.
It's too early.....
The clock reads 7:53. Another coincidence.
Now I'm too lazy.....

Staring at the maps of a tree's life in the pine design
Startling pictures emerge
Rings become isorhythms, indicating elevation
(not the John Deere/ corn crib kind).
Knotholes become craters where bits of star hit.
There are views from far above
Topographic landscapes that someone must have drawn
(How could these just happen?)
Cross sections of a hill and an inactive volcano
I can see the pool of magma deep inside, waiting.
Oh Lord, stir the dying fire in my soul
And just, please, help me get up.
I have to read "The Conversion of the Jews."

Irises
Francine Tolf

An island of irises
rises this morning
from a garden I pass,
so breathtaking in loveliness
it would be unnatural
not to stop and praise:

Tall as goddesses
among other flowers,
pale green stems rise proudly, bearing crowns
of luxuriant blossoms
dripping purple like honey,
the shyer lavender petals
bowing over one another modestly,
folded over their secret flower hearts
where the brightness of yellow nests,
spilling delicately onto the velvety rich petals
of purple trailing, melting down
from the folded secret.

If these creatures were sentient,
how could they help but be proud?
And how terrible to see them
in so short a time,
still tall but withered and dry,
with what petals left lifeless as parchment,
shivering in the summer noon,
their hearts exposed to the sun,
uncovered and untreasured
by any who pass.

November Elegy
Gale Tolf

Early winter rain drizzles from plain gray watercolor skies
As cold makes corpses of living things twisted and disfigured
The migrant birds have left and rodents snarl and shiver
I am a centennial of the seasons and view this one in military outfit
The bleak otherness makes me a noun- a thing- a mental patient
My love sonnets are psychotic jibberish which breed

what emotion?
Alarm? Pity? Contempt? Yet I send them none-the-less
I am a tree stripped naked of opulant foliage to charm
But my Druid and Aryan roots go deep to ancient gods and goddesses
Residing in bowels of Hades who feed me nourishment
I have a bark stronger than that of an army of trained dogs
But I speak in symbolic, mystical language and no one listens
Except you- a shell-like arabesque ear with perfect pitch
I live in fear of the approaching darkening solstice
Has it encompassed you to a place where you cannot hear me?
Read my verse naked on faceted rock by the lead gray Pacific
Braving the crashing surf and prehistoric cormorants
My spirit haunts that land I loved more than Eden
It is only reborn through my poetry- or in liquid form
Hear me. my hero, with my own tongue in sleet with sky darkening

Locked In
Tom Torkelson

They are here for a time
(prisioners or participants?)
Some learn some to baby sit
A girl praises her dead guitar idol
A boy (pretending to be a man)
plays a part in a play only he understands

How much truth
How much hurt
Is buried beneath their laughter
Dear God, please help them
Because sometimes it seems you're
the only one who cares
who loves
who watches over
these searching, hurting, blind souls
. . . like mine

Untitled
Tom Torkelson

See slumped shoulders
speak, symbolically, of human helplessness

Alone, without help,
we achieve grief and hell

Still we try, as we die
such slow, such low
such terrible deaths

Plodding on
with pride our legacy
and vanity our grave

The hope of a better life
surely many hold

But life goes on, we fax and fuss
the rush to see, the urge to surge

And in our haste
and through the waste
the cry of our soul
is never heard

Answer me this and you will find
the cause of ill to all mankind:

Why is it thought to rest in peace, divine,
but to live in peace, absurd?

94 94 94 94 94 94 94

94 94 94 94 94 94 94

94 94 94 94 94 94 94

94 94 94 94 94 94 94

94 94 94 94 94 94 94

94 94 94 94 94 94 94

94 94 94 94 94 94 94

94 94 94 94 94 94 94

94 94 94 94 94 94 94

94 94 94 94 94 94 94

Wordeater

94